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BETWEEN THE TWILIGHTS

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THE TRAMP AND HIS WOMAN
BETWEEN SLEEPING AND WAKING
TIME'S HARVEST
THE RETURNING HEART

BETWEEN THE TWILIGHTS

BY

DOROTHY CHARQUES



HAMISH HAMILTON

LONDON

First published 1947

Between the Twilights

"For I know that paths are dark
Between the two twilights"

George Meredith

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PART I

IN THE VILLAGE OF ALNE

A CARRIAGE and two greys wheeled out of the station yard into the little market town of Sigbarrow, past Mr. Pottinger's auction ground, very economically planted with fruit trees, past the Miss Painter's Dame School, where Miss Painter, as invariably happened on Friday afternoons, was practising with her pupils the tonic sol-fa. Doh-reh-mi-soh, and again, doh-reh-mi, Margaret heard, her hands warm under a sheepskin rug smelling of moth-balls. The carriage sped on down Malthouse Lane, swerved right round the corner—Margaret caught at her husband's arm —sped past the red-brick house, its gateway decorated with pink acorns in white plaster egg-cups, up the small hill beside the new plantation of fir trees, over the hump-backed bridge, and so, once more, to the village of Alne.

The village, it seemed to Margaret on returning again, was not a village so much as a place of trees. They stood alone in the still frost-bound world like statues; they towered magnificently against the sky: the great ash, the three elms, the sycamore, the row of limes. How long since I came here, she thought, and so much time wasted! I must have my children quickly—I should like three children. And Edward must love me always. If I am loved, I am kind, I am happy. But only then. "Always love me, Edward," she said earnestly, "for your own sake."

Her husband's arm tightened about her. "And what if I do not?" he said.

The village, after the discreet pattern of villages, was ready to receive them. Heads were thrust boldly from upstairs windows, then, from the extreme bitterness of the cold, thrust in; curtains were twitched aside, but the small

window panes were frosted over: all that could be observed were lacy patterns and mazes of fern leaves, of frost flowers of javelins and scimitars of ice. Nevertheless, whether by accident or hardihood, the carriage was seen, its occupants noted. Mrs. Rainbow, as wrinkled and almost as large as an elephant, but not nearly so shapely, braved the cold—she was apt to turn a little queer at least once a week—and stood at her gate, a green tablecloth held over her head, a cooking-fork like a trident in her hand. Margaret looked at her. "I was as slim as you are once, miss, ma'am, though you'd never think it," Mrs. Rainbow called out. "Ah, but I wasn't slim long."

Edward Furness shook his head at her. 'What did she say?" Margaret asked and leaned back in the carriage.

The Reverend Beauchamp Walters, who was in the act of visiting Mrs. Grumm, the shepherd's wife, paused to wave an arm in salute to his young schoolmaster, to his own coachman. In the same instant, the jackdaw hung in the wicker cage outside the door contrived, as it always did very pleasantly, with an upward quirk of its tail, to leave its mark upon the Rector's tall hat. Mr. John Forester, the farmer, and Mr. Andrew Chapman, the miller, who were on their way home from the final meeting Seth Doddington had called to arrange for to-morrow's Frost Fair, ceased their argument and raised their hats. Behind their lace curtains, behind the deodar on the lawn, the two Miss Barnacles were careful not to look out. They had no need. Miss Kitty was one of those who see everything at a glance. "Not a lady, Henrietta. Ladylike," she said. "Not a beauty, of course. Personable." She continued to write to her nephew Tom in the Leeward Islands. The nine little Gorralls rushed out from behind the round box bush, which was all that grew in their garden, to stare. The family of Odells, like so many sportive young bulls, followed. All of them stared. The cows came winding out of the field from Farmer Forester's milking-sheds, their warm red backs steaming in

the cold air; the rooks, as rooks had done for at least two hundred years, cawed home to the wood.

In the house Mrs. Fairey tied the strings of her bonnet, fastened her cape and said (since she lived so lonely a life at the timber yard, she often talked to herself): "I'll let them come in and have the house to theirselves to-day." She called from the door in louder tones to her four-year old son: "George, I'm sure you've picked up enough sticks for a month o' Sundays." George, struggling under the weight of a basket of logs, came into the house. Having locked the back door and put the key under the mat, Mrs. Fairey crossed the road, and, George hanging upon her arm, hurried out of sight.

The carriage arrived; the horses were brought to a standstill; Margaret Furness—Margaret Hill until that morning—stepped out. She looked up; through a veil with white spots upon it she saw the house, the two dormer windows, the six red stone steps flanked by the wrought-iron railings. She saw more than these. In a moment a whole familiar world, a whole life were whisked away from before her eyes. She hesitated for a moment as though in sudden doubt or dismay, then, catching at her long skirt with one hand, and hesitating no longer, she ran up the stone steps into the house. Almost as quickly her husband followed her. For the first time in all history the door of the house shut behind them both.

To-day, the fifteenth Saturday since the first visitation of the long frost, was to be Frost Fair. Fourteen weeks of frost and the river was frozen hard. You could skate the length of the river—the Odell boys had done so—from sunrise to sunset and never meet animal or bird that was alive, never see anything but ice, and frosted grass, and rimed trees. Many of the larger birds had gone inland; the animals, fox and otter and badger, haunted the river banks still, leaving small footprints where the rime fallen from the trees lay

harsher than snow upon the ground. The heron had flown over long since, and, dropping low in the bitter cold mist, the wild swans. The small birds died and fell like leaves, or, crowding round the houses, sought shelter in every out-house and barn. Only the hawks by day, the owls by night lived like vultures and grew sleek on the bodies of the dead. You could hear the kestrel's screech and the brown owl's echoing cry; you could even see under the bright thin moon how the white owls flew, silent and drifting, down the still vistas between the frost-bound trees. Yet even their wings froze; even their eyes, hunter-keen though they were, glazed.

Frost Fair had been Seth Doddington's idea, and Edward Furness—the two men were friends—had been the first to approve the notion. Seth had worked like a slow thaw, unfreezing reluctance, opening closed purses and puritan minds, of which there were not a few in Sigbarrow and Alne. He had a weakness for ceremonies, almost a genius for arranging them.

The fair was still in its leisurely early stages. The event of the afternoon—a race between the rival butchers of Sigbarrow—was still to come. In order to make everything certain, Seth himself was measuring out the last stage of the course again. His assistant, Sam Odell, who was as brown and hairy, Seth said, as if he had just come out of a burrow, followed him about on all fours on the ice, the ends of a piece of string hanging, like a Mikado's mous-taches, over either side of his mouth. "Nine inches at fault, Sam," Seth said, very mild, handing over his foot-rule.

Bill Daffin, the carpenter, was making more secure the birch pole to which one end of the scarlet finishing-rope was tied, and old Betsy, applewoman in summer, hot-potato woman in winter, yawned over her coke brazier. "Nothing warms up until night-time, nothing," old Betsy said.

The butcher from the neighbouring town of Lattisforde, a stout red-faced personage in a high upstanding hat of

starched linen, was sharpening his knife before a crowd of small onlookers. Already the fire in the brick oven set upon the ice was glowing and fierce, the spit, a whole bullock turning upon it, was working smoothly, and the first gravy beginning to flow. Forty feet away the butcher's assistant was fixing a small roasting-pig in position before yet another fire. "Ain't he a nice little pig, ain't he?" Jimmy Gorrall said. "He was my pig once, he was." Jim spoke wistfully. No one of the other children answered him. Pigs were pigs and meant to be eaten, their looks plainly said. He's not my pig now, Jim thought, he's everybody's pig. Tenderly he put out a hand and just touched the little pig's tail.

Jim's eyes followed the other children's eyes. "Here her is," they all whispered; then, shuffling their feet and staring hard, "here her comes."

Margaret Furness came towards them on her husband's arm. She saw everything: the S-bend of the river, the tall shapes of the trees, the turning spits, and the lost look in Jimmy Gorrall's eyes and his small pointed ears.

"That is Jimmy," Edward Furness said. There was a certain flushed deliberation about him as he spoke. He held himself stiffly but gallantly. He had a spare, erect figure, and full, astonishingly blue eyes.

As if she were unconscious of all the interested looks cast upon her, Margaret came on. She had passed through the events of the day so far, and of the day before that, in a kind of dream. Yet all that had happened, all that she had seen, was instant and sharp in her mind: her last glimpse of the white house on the down, her father's house once, her brother Edmund's house now; her husband's look, the feel of his hand on her arm as she entered the carriage; her own face in the mirror as they drove away, her eyes brilliant but with blue shadows under them, her lips redder than geranium or rose—as if I had painted them, she had thought in shocked, half-pleased surprise—and there, in her lap, her hands, thin, nervous, white, the blue veins branching in

them like slender trees. "You look," Edmund's wife, Prue, had said, generous and laughing as Prue always was, "as if a puff of wind would blow you away." Then, "Why did you not carry her off before this, Edward?" Prue had asked. "I'd have my wife know her own mind," Edward had said.

I know my mind now, I know it now and for ever, Margaret thought.

Seth Doddington left his assistant at that moment and came towards them. He called Margaret "Ma'am," in old-fashioned courtly style; he spoke in a slow, murmuring voice. All the heats had been run yesterday, ma'am, he said; there was only the main event between Garlick and Baxter and Parker still to come.

"And where is Anna, where is Mrs. Doddington?" Margaret asked.

"Anna should be here," Seth said. "But I don't see her," he declared, looking about him with a faintly worried air. "I'd like you to meet Ellen too"—Ellen was Anna's sister, he explained. "And there is my mother-in-law, Mrs. Tufton, as well. Some day you must meet her," he added evasively.

"Everyone will be here, of course," Margaret said. If not to meet the schoolmaster's new wife, at least to look at her. And perhaps to disapprove, she told herself. "Miss Kitty and Miss Henrietta Barnacle, for instance." She laughed at her husband and spoke aloud.

"A saucer of milk for them," Edward Furness said. For there was war, even if it was undeclared, between the Miss Barnacles and himself, the Miss Barnacles who had been born in the eighteen-thirties, who lived in them even yet, who would have liked time to stand still, and children to curtsy, and young men do no better than pull their forelocks.

The crowd were jostling each other and standing on tip-toe. Several small urchins had climbed the trees on the opposite bank. From this vantage point, looking like Christmas crackers in the white branches, they began at

once to cheer. "Hooray, hooray," they shouted, waving their caps, "they're a'comin', Garlick's a-comin'." A small running speck in the next moment could clearly be seen rounding the farthest bend of the river. It was followed at a short distance by another, and yet another. That portion of the crowd which had followed the race all the way from the starting-point came running behind the competitors into view. There were dogs making wide detours and barking wildly, children running like dogs and shaking their heads, and grown-ups prancing and blowing like prize bulls. In the midst of it all, smooth as a swan on water, the Reverend Beauchamp Walters, mounted upon his white horse, leaped the bridge that divided the road from the water meadows.

Everything from this point moved with the special swiftness which waits upon all endings. The shining pieces of the leading pony's harness could be seen, and the white star on his forehead, and the flat top of the butcher's cart, and the braced stance of Bill Garlick. The three competitors drew closer together; Garlick's pony and another came racing neck and neck round the last bend. The spectators shouted and clapped, or, leaning forward with bent knees, slapped their thighs.

A young woman—she was Nancy Odell, Edward Furness explained—climbed a small heap of stones at this juncture, and cupped both hands to her mouth. "Bill Garlick, Bill Garlick, don't 'ee loose me down now, don't 'ee," she shouted.

Almost before anyone knew it the race was won, and Bill Garlick's pony, rolling wild eyes, dashed past the winning-post.

The exhilaration of the race lasted only a moment longer; the ponies were led away; the heroes became part of the crowd once more, and everyone prepared for the next thing.

Amid all the uproar of the past five minutes Margaret had

been aware of a pair of dark eyes fixed upon her in an intent smiling gaze. The young woman was dressed expensively enough, but with little taste, in a short bunchy coat of blue cloth, a darker bustled skirt and a hat of fawn overburdened with buckles and bows. There was something both gentle and simple about her look, and the dark eyes and the faintly smiling mouth stayed in the mind.

This must be Anna Doddington, Margaret thought. She would have spoken, but the Reverend Beauchamp Walters was tiptoeing over the grass towards her, followed at no great distance by a stocky gentleman in a round bowler hat and a green and fawn check suit. "My brother Tom, Major Walters, the best flute-player in Ireland," the Reverend Beauchamp Walters announced, taking the short stocky gentleman by the arm. "Edward Furness, the finest young schoolmaster in the county, and Mrs. Edward Furness," he said again. At once it was clear that everything the Rector of Alne did would be gallant and unexpected, everything would be accompanied by a faint fine Hibernian flourish of trumpets.

Hardly were the Furnesses alone once more than the two Miss Barnacles bore down upon Margaret, their looks hard and sultry under a cloud of smiles. Miss Kitty introduced herself and her sister. "I am Miss Kitty, this is Miss Henrietta."

This is my royal occasion, Margaret thought. Like royalty itself, she did and said everything that was suitable but scarcely anything that was worth recording.

Lord, let us get out of this, Edward Furness prayed secretly. And he looked around him to make certain that no child in the parish of Alne should be guilty of curtsying to the Miss Barnacles.

As if in obedience to his prayer the sun that had appeared fixed in the sky since noon gradually became obscured. The sky grew milky-opal-coloured, the frosted fields were touched with the same light. As dusk came nearer the bon-

fires ranged along the bend of the river leapt suddenly into sight in a fountain of sparks and flame. Presently, as it were below the roar and crackle of the branches, old Ned Parsloe could be heard drawing his bow tenderly across his fiddle-strings.

It was then at last that Seth brought his wife over to the Furnesses. "This is Anna," he said, looking very kindly down at his wife, then immediately around him as if he were seeking someone else.

Once more Margaret met the dark eyes, the smiling intent gaze she remembered from a short while before.

"Why did you not speak to me?" she asked laughingly.

Anna smiled back at her. "I didn't dare."

"Anna remembers you when you came first," Edward said.

"You wore a hat composed entirely of pink roses," Anna reminded her.

"I remember. I remember every year by my hats," Margaret declared.

They were foolish and laughing together when Seth, in an oddly contented voice, announced: "Now I will go and bring Ellen over as well."

"My half-sister Ellen," Anna said, and it seemed to Margaret that her voice flattened, her look changed as she spoke.

Ellen Tufton was no goddess. Her neck was goitred, her cheeks polished and red. Her eyes were dark like Anna's eyes but buttonish and bright. She had a curiously quick, sidelong glance, an abrupt jerky gait. Like a starling, Margaret thought, and she looked quickly at Ellen, then looked as quickly away.

"I've heard a lot about you," Ellen said, looking at Margaret, and giggling, and jerking her head. "Oh, it wasn't all complimentary, if you come to that." She tossed again in the next moment. "Don't look so black at me, our Anna, but then I don't care if you do." She half-turned

away then and hugged Seth's arm. "Oh, Seth, they're going to dance a polka, I do declare. Let you and me have it, oh Seth, I do love a polka so, I do."

"If I must," Seth answered, sighing, but with a pleased air. He went off with his sister-in-law good-humouredly, and Anna went with them.

At that moment a small girl overweighted with clothing pulled at Edward Furness's coat. "Master, please—please, master, Offie Bamford's fallen out of a tree and cut hisself." Her face tilted, the child waited patiently.

"I know why Offie Bamford has fallen out of a tree," Margaret, with a strange softening of heart, heard her husband say. "Because he's too fat," Edward said, and the small thing holding on to his hand and walking beside him now, nodded solemnly.

A young woman with a bleached white face addressed Margaret as the two drew away. "There never was anybody like Mr. Furness with the children. They're not afraid on him one bit. I never see anything like it in a man. And he don't chastise 'em, or hardly ever. And when he does, he says, so my Jimmy tells me, 'Come on, you young hounds, come on.' They got to own up then; they got to have their punishment then, they knows that. But, bless you, it's soon over, and they don't mind. When my Jimmy had the fever Mr. Furness sat up wi' him nights until he was past the turn. There was nobody but him and the doctor and Mr. Walters that 'ud come near—I reckon all the rest was too afraid. There was a lot o' people died from the fever that year."

"You must be Jimmy Gorrall's mother; you must be Mrs. Gorrall," Margaret said, interrupting her.

"That's right. Nobody can't help knowing me, I got so many children," Mrs. Gorrall said, a gleam of fun for a moment wiping some of the tiredness from her face.

Left to herself once more, Margaret moved a short distance away from the dancers. She walked on, past old Betsy,

who, her lap full of hot potatoes, was half-asleep, past the last of the bonfires, beyond the boundaries of Frost Fair. She halted in the far water-meadow. Now only the faraway scrape of the fiddle could be heard, and the distant noise of the dancers, and the faint stir and creak of the frost-laden boughs. Under and over all the noise and traffic of people was the stillness of trees, of the frozen river, the frozen fields; over and above all the flames and the bright moving lanterns was the cool, flowery—like white wood anemones, like Christmas roses—light of the moon. She walked on still further, then looked back. Frost Fair showed like a toy; the men and women dancing appeared like mannikins only and above the dying glare of the bonfires was a web of shadow.

Presently she stood on the edge of the crowd once more within sight of the dancing and near Anna Doddington. She spoke involuntarily out of a momentary longing. "Quite soon I shall go home." For I know no one, she thought. She hugged her hands in her muff in sudden childish fashion. Incongruously then she saw the larder in the Furnesses' house as she had seen it yesterday for the first time: the barrels of beer and home-made wine, the alarming bachelor display of chops and steaks. She saw again the three bedrooms, and Edward's room and hers with the four-poster bed. "Three bedrooms. Will there be room for all the children?" she had asked on an afterthought, her foot on the stair.

"Shall we be friends?" Anna, interrupting her thoughts, said.

Startled, Margaret came back to herself. "If you wish." But that was too stiff an answer. She became confused. "There they are, there," she declared. She pointed to where Seth and Ellen were to be seen taking part in the chain of the Lancers. "Of course we'll be friends," she said.

"Ellen loves to dance," Anna said. "There is so much

of what village people call 'nature' in her." She smiled faintly. "It is better to be like that, of course, better to be lively and forget oneself. I think so."

"I can never forget myself," Margaret said. She looked at Anna. A man might prefer Ellen, her mind went, a woman so bouncing and alive. She looked away. Anna is like me; Anna makes too much of feeling, she thought in a quick aside.

Anna put out a hand and touched her sleeve. "If we are to be friends I ought to tell you first that no one in the neighbourhood thinks well of Ellen, or of my mother, or of me."

From surprise Margaret spoke quickly. "I don't think I mind in the least what people say."

"Most people mind," Anna said, still looking at her. "Most people mind a great deal."

"Mind a great deal about what?" Seth came up from behind and caught at Anna's elbow, an awkward and faintly guilty look on his face.

"Scandal. Gossip," Margaret said, and laughed.

"You get used to both. In time you get that you don't care," Seth said, a curious hardening on his face.

The four of them parted soon after that. When the Furnesses were more than half-way home, suddenly Margaret said: "Anna has asked me to see her. She wishes us to be friends. At the same time she appears to believe that people, people in the village and outside it, she means, will not think so well of us if she and I are friends."

"There is something in that, as things are," at last, and as though reluctantly, Edward said. "It's not Anna. Anna has no enemies. It's her mother. It's old Bridget."

"But why?"

"Oh, an old story. In villages people have long memories." He came on in silence for a moment. "My sister Kit was willing enough to know Anna when she came to keep house for me first, but Kit did not get very far."

"Do I have to do what Kit did? I don't think I will," Margaret declared.

"You start fresh. Of course you do. Why be so quick to ask?" her husband said, a hint of reproach in his voice.

Laughing, "I like to be certain," Margaret said. She held his arm. "Yes, I start fresh." Her voice now held an unbounded confidence, an unbounded determination. "I will be friends with Anna Doddington. Yes, I think I will," she said again, and swung a hand.

"If you can," Edward said. He was silent then.

They had almost returned. The crescent curve of the small houses could be seen once more, and the row of limes. The moon, risen higher now, cast faint opal shadows, the distant hills showed milky-blue. Here at last was the house, the red stone steps, the iron railings frosted and glittering under the moon. Margaret looked about her while Edward sought for his key. This is mine. This is what I shall see always, she thought. All her thoughts were jealous and possessive and firm.

From the warm darkness of the small hallway as they entered came the mingled smell of soap and polish, of the lamp and the fire, and something else, that can never be defined, the smell that belongs to a house, to no other house, that greets every stranger.

It feels like Kit's house; it is Kit's house, Margaret thought again. But one day it will be as if Kit had never been in it, as if no other woman had ever owned it but me.

Her husband's arms were round her suddenly. Forgetful of Kit, forgetful at last even of herself, she clung to him then.

The January fair was almost forgotten: spring was all but here in sunny February days, in cold searching winds. Margaret stood at the window of the house that looked over the field and the row of limes. Grumm the shepherd passed. The rabbit-catcher, raw and red as a newly-turned

clod of earth, followed, his ferrets seething like a cauldron of snakes in a bag on his back. Grumm and Hardiman, Margaret's mind went, five minutes to two, of course. Who in this village ever needs a clock? She moved into the middle of the room; putting up both hands before the mirror, she loosened her hair. She was like a young girl in her restlessness, in her preoccupation with herself. Mrs. Fairey, busy over the brasses at the small table under the kitchen window masked by geraniums, was aware of it without being able to express her feeling in words. She was a little woman with a dark round head crowned with tight plaits. There was almost a Mongol look about the slant of her eyes, the turn of cheek and jaw. For the rest, she had a creased smiling face and light blue eyes. Her name suited her: Sophia Jane Fairey.

"Should I be helping you?" Margaret spoke guiltily. She blushed then. I am not behaving as I should; I should be more settled, she thought.

She leaned the tips of her fingers upon the table. "Mrs. Fairey, do you see much of Mrs. Doddington?"

Mrs. Fairey polished the brasses. She spoke cautiously. "Not to talk to I don't." She looked up. She appeared to lay caution to one side with her polishing-cloth. "There's times when I've been downright sorry for her." She polished again. "That beautiful female! There's not a bit o' catmint in the parish there isn't one of her cats makin' love upon it."

"Now you are talking of Mrs. Tufton." Margaret pinched a geranium leaf hesitantly between finger and thumb. "I have been so full of myself I haven't found time yet to see Mrs. Doddington." She looked up. "I liked her," she said. "Do you know, Mrs. Fairey, I have never taken quite so sudden a liking to any woman before." She turned to go upstairs.

"Don't you be put off seeing her then by Bridget Tufton," Mrs. Fairey called after her.

"I won't. No, I won't." Margaret went on somewhat thoughtfully up the stairs.

The timber yard where the Doddingtons lived, and where Mrs. Fairey also had her cottage, lay over the fields some short distance away from the village and near the river. Margaret made her way there in a pleasant, lazy fashion. For all her absorption in her own affairs a certain amount of gossip about Anna Doddington had reached her. She had wished to know more. "What is all this talk about the Doddingtons and the Tuftons?" she had asked her husband boldly at last.

"If you must know," Edward had said, "Bridget went off with a tramp."

"A tramp!" The romantic in Margaret was oddly delighted. Who was he? she wished to know.

"That I can't tell you," Edward said. "The man came to the door and spoke to her. She left what she was doing and went off with him."

"And Anna is his child, of course," Margaret had said thoughtfully.

She skirted the edge of the wood that hid the timber yard from sight. The rooks kept up a continual cawing overhead; hazel catkins swung like censers against the blue of sky; ash wands were tipped and as though shod with bronze. From the entrance to the wood the youngest of the Gorralls came singing a ditty all her own, a bunch of bird's-eye speedwell and hazel catkins in one hand, all the spring in her green eyes. "Lambs' tails, lambs' tails," she sang, "birds' eyes, birds' eyes."

A woman whom Margaret took to be Bridget Tufton was leaning against the gate to the timber yard and looking at her. She was tall and thin, with grey, curiously brilliant eyes, and a brown plait wound like a ribbon round her white hair.

Margaret halted and spoke pleasantly. "I think you must be Mrs. Tufton."

"I am," the other woman answered.

"Might I see Anna?" Margaret said, and paused.

"Anna's out," Mrs. Tufton said, not compromising at all.

"Then I will wait for her if I may." Margaret laid a hand firmly on the gate.

"As you please." Mrs. Tufton, an odd peremptoriness about her, waved her on with a sweep of one arm, then turned abruptly up the small path on her right that led to the wood.

Somewhat hesitantly now Margaret followed a wide drive that curved round to the left. On one side, half-hidden from sight, the river flowed. She could hear the ripple it made past the osier beds, and the suck of the water cleaving away from the piles by the water's edge. To the left, thrust against the shelving bank of the wood, was a large cottage built of timber and red brick. Next to the house were more sheds and what appeared to be stables; last of all was another and smaller cottage, red-bricked and timbered like the first, and approached by a cinder path. Margaret knocked at the larger of the two cottages and waited.

There was no sound. On a sudden decision she lifted the latch and went in. Her heart beating quickly—for all this combined to make an odd reception, she felt—she looked about her. A log fire burned on the open hearth, the jointed carcase of a rabbit lay on a chopping-board under the window; beside it was a blue-and-white crock full of herbs. Various empty saucers were scattered about the rag rug and the tiled floor, and over all the scent of wood smoke was a raw-rabbit stench, and besides that a curious musky smell. Margaret waited distastefully for a few seconds. So this perhaps was what Kit found when she came to see Anna, this was what Kit saw. On an impulse almost of sympathy with Kit, who had visited the Tuftons' house in the timber yard once, and once only, she went outside.

The garden, which was small and which seemed to lean

under the wood, held a number of flowers already in bloom: daffodils, early primroses, yellow crocuses. Cypress trees were like green flames beside squat shapes of cut box and yew. A rabbit's skin hung drying upon a pea-stick; a bird's clawed beak and torn-off wings lay scattered on one of the pebbled paths. There were other bird bones to be seen, broken and white and frail, beside the neat box hedges and upon the soil of the garden beds.

She found a flat stone in the sun and sat down upon it. Hardly had she settled herself than Bridget Tufton, her heavy skirts scarcely lifting above her white stockings, came stepping down the bank. Together the two women walked down the path. Since she was by this time a little out of humour, Margaret was almost too polite; in return Bridget was contemptuous and dry.

As the older woman began to move once more towards the house Margaret spoke frankly—frankness, she decided, could be as intimidating as rudeness. "I feel that you would very much prefer that I did not see Anna."

Bridget looked astonished for a moment, paused for a moment, then spoke severely. "I won't have my daughter taken up and dropped, and taken up again."

"I need a friend. I am not likely to behave in that fashion," Margaret said.

Her cheeks burning—first I am bold with this woman; then I am not so bold, she thought—once more she turned towards home. As she rounded the corner of the drive Anna came walking slowly and dejectedly towards her.

Anna's pace quickened then. She waved a hand. She greeted Margaret between anxiety and relief. "You have come. I have been hoping for so long that you would come."

She spoke anxiously again in the next moment. "And you don't mind my mother's queer ways? You are sure you don't object to all the scandal you must have heard by this time about the Tuftons?"

"I don't care for your mother's manner," Margaret said.

Once more she spoke gaily. "And she may not have cared for mine. I don't think she did. But I liked you from the beginning. Why should I mind the rest?"

"I think I know why, or partly why my mother was so peculiar, why she appeared so unwilling for us to meet," Anna said. "She knows I talk too much. And she hates me to talk. Really she dislikes me to make friends. She is afraid I shall make confidences."

"Why should you not talk? Why should you not make friends?" There was a note of impatience now in Margaret's voice.

"It is all part of the same thing," Anna said and paused.

They stood together by the gate to the timber yard without speaking; then, as though unwilling to part, turned into the wood and sat down. It was sunny between the trees, and, for so small a wood, curiously still. Margaret clasped her knees; Anna watched her, a faint smile on her face.

She leaned forward and spoke. "They say there was a castle here once where our house stands, and this wood where we are now was the moat. You can see some of the stones still." She pointed.

But Margaret, who could never follow the direction of anyone's hand, could see nothing but beech trees.

"I have come here so often I get fanciful," Anna said again. "All the dead lying under us, I think, all the old bygone misery under our feet like river mud. Our own unhappiness stirs it up again, stirs up what is left of other far-off things in our own minds. Do you think that is possible?"

"I don't feel I know," Margaret replied. She spread out a hand and looked at it absently. Scarcely anything is written there yet, scarcely anything, she thought. "When one is happy," she said, "one knows nothing, one scarcely thinks at all."

"And you are happy? You look happy." Anna paused

again. "There are happy and unhappy people, I tell myself sometimes, people who are happy or unhappy from the beginning." She took up some pebbles from the path and ran them through her fingers, balancing them every now and then on the back of one hand. "'All the days run into one another,' my mother said to me once, 'all the things you do.' She has unexpected spurts of feeling, almost of poetry sometimes. As though, I tell myself, a spring of water welled out of the surface of the earth, then was drawn in again. She's not strong or self-reliant then. It is as if she were asking for something, affection perhaps, understanding perhaps. Almost I understand her, almost I like her then. Normally I don't like her." She looked up, the stones balanced on one hand. "Does that seem strange to you?"

"No, not strange." Margaret hesitated. "Liking and not liking, do they apply to your mother? Does she wish to be liked?"

"Not now perhaps," Anna answered. Once more she played with the stones. "Perhaps she was different before I knew her, before I was born." She waited, then went on again. "There's a dreadful energy about her now and then as if her thoughts would not let her rest, as if so much energy in her were only so much vitality spoiled. When she spoke to me in that way it was one of those starry nights when you can hear the frost falling from the trees, and the groan of the boughs. She had been going in and out of the house, to the river bank, to the water's edge and back again, for no reason that I could see. It was then, when she came in, that I asked her about my own father. I had never dared speak of him before. 'Your father was a sad-eyed fellow.' That was all she said." Anna dropped the stones one by one into her lap.

"How old were you?" Margaret asked curiously.

"I was twelve," Anna said. "I have never spoken about my father to her since. There is a power about my mother,

a power of forbidding, so that I am prevented even from speaking, so that I can never do what I wish." She looked at Margaret. "I think you feel it too."

"It makes me behave unpleasantly," Margaret declared.

"It makes me want to go into corners," Anna said. "It makes me want to crouch and hide. It's a power she uses even against herself. It is as if instead of happiness, and love, and the ordinary things, she wished for dominion and power. I can't explain. When I try to explain I use the wrong words, Biblical words, as if I had read the Bible too much when I was a child, as if I had never known anything else," Anna said.

It was an odd story. One could make little enough of it, Margaret thought, and she bent her head on her knees. Like all lonely people Anna talked to empty herself; she needed an audience only.

"My mother is not like other women," Anna said. She sought in the path for more stones. "Perhaps she has never been like them. To go off with my father like that was a very strange thing for her or for any woman to do. I think it happened like this. She went off with him, and until it was too late she could never bring herself to turn back. She is like that: it is a kind of pride in her never to turn back."

Margaret lifted her head. "It is all past. Could you not forget it?"

"How can either of us forget? We are cut off from other people because of it," Anna said.

That was true, Margaret thought. Villagers have long memories, Edward had said. In a village one must never sink from one's station, she reminded herself, one must never fall from grace. "And you like it here?" she asked. She dug with a small piece of stick at the loose earth in the path. There was this attachment of village people also to be taken into account, of most people perhaps, to the one place.

"Seth loves the timber yard," Anna said. "He bought it when he came to these parts first. At least, he didn't buy

it," she corrected herself, "the agreement was that he should work and pay for it bit by bit. That is what we are doing still. People say I went with the timber yard. I didn't." Margaret looked at her and smiled then, a sudden warm smile. And Anna went on more confidently: "Really I don't belong here. I am the only one that doesn't belong here. I don't know where I belong. I told Seth so. I wasn't good enough for him, I said." She paused, then went on once more: "Funnily enough, my mother spent part of her own money in sending me to school. It was her pride that made her do that. So that I am half-educated," she said, smiling.

Margaret looked up militantly, the twig like a rod in her hand. "Were you happy at school?"

Anna shook her head. "The others bullied me. And I never fought back."

On a sudden decision Margaret got to her feet. "Come home with me for an hour or so." She stooped and dusted her skirts. "I'll speak to your mother. I'll say you are coming." She paused, a conscious militancy about her now, "I like fighting. I would never give in," she said. Gathering her long skirts together in one hand, she hurried on.

As if she were unaware of their presence, Bridget came out of the house towards them, the platter of rabbit meat in her hand.

"Ask her now, ask her," Anna whispered urgently while hanging back like a child.

Margaret raised her voice. "Anna is coming back with me, Mrs. Tufton."

Now I am interfering, I am taking Anna under my wing. Why? she asked. For one half of her mind not infrequently watched and questioned the other half.

Bridget gave no sign of having heard. She came to the edge of the wood and called, beating the platter with her knife: "Grimm, Lucifer, Tiger, Jezebel, Jane." Her voice was clear and strong, some quality of youth about it still,

and the names made a curious metrical jingle as they fell from her lips. In the next moment her cats came running and streaking towards her from the timber yard and the wood.

Margaret took Anna's arm. "Come." Together they went away. At the last moment they turned and looked back. There, below them, under the burnished blue of sky, between the dark flames of the cypress trees, were the arched leaping bodies of the cats, and Bridget standing full in the light, the red gobbets of meat dropping from her fingers, the red gobbets of meat lying upon the grass.

"Do you know, I think we shall be friends now, you and I. I think we shall, I do think so," Anna said, hurrying away, a vast breathless contentment and something of resolution also in her voice.

PART II

MARGARET AND ANNA

CHAPTER ONE

MAFEKING

THE trees, grown taller and larger by ten years of growth, spread about Alne a thicker wall of green. The old century, its gold lace tarnished long since, even its pepper-and-salt suits faded, had petered out in the shabbiest, even if the most resounding, of little wars. The old Queen, the years heavier upon her than the orb and sceptre were heavy in her hand, was failing too, moving out a little after her century on the slow turn of the new Liberal tide. The new century, between a night and a morning, like everything else, was born; the new age, nameless yet and unknown, was round and full as a new moon in the sky.

It was May 1900. Moonlight was lit mother-of-pearl, the May dusk was heavy with green leaves. The lighted torches tossed over the small bridge between the fir trees; the banners of the Worshipful Company of Saddle and Harness Makers, of the Oddfellows, waved; the Union Jack, as though to add that appropriate touch of foolishness which is necessary to all processions, from the very amplitude of its folds almost took flight in an unexpected burst of wind, taking Sergeant John Christopher with it; the Royal Victoria and Albert band, stepping out like guardsmen, played "See the Conquering Hero Comes." The Conquering Hero himself, who was no more than a very tired young man, though he ranked in Sigbarrow and Alne as a personage, sat up in the carriage with a good and obedient grace. He had been wounded in South Africa; he was due home; his arrival had coincided

with the news of the relief of Mafeking; and now, this evening, the enthusiasm, the band, the torches were not, he realized, for him so much as for the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts himself, who had relieved the town and brought to a grateful country release from anxiety and further good news after weeks of gloom. Here was an assurance of victory; here, everyone hoped, was an earnest of peace. The carriage creaked and swayed; the six good men of Sigbarrow, who had harnessed themselves to the shafts, dashed the sweat from their eyes; the band, with scarcely a pause, slipped into "The British Grenadiers." Sergeant John Christopher, whose personal private anthem this was, took a firmer hold of the flag; the greenfinches, as though in alarm, dipped and flew away out of the fir trees; and the Volunteers, the Worshipful Company of Saddle and Harness Makers, the High Bailiff, the Low Bailiff, the Master of the Oddfellows, all the rest of the procession, the dogs, the small boys, and Miss Kitty Barnacle in her self-propelled invalid-chair, rounded the corner at last into the village of Alne.

Edward Furness, his small daughter astride his shoulders, came on with the rest. He was laughing; she was beautifully grave. The torches tossed before her, the light hurt her eyes, the trees, unseen before in this light, were too green, too dark; even the moon, pale and mounting, even the stars, caught and faintly shining in the dark net of the fir trees, were strangers, were mystery.

"Barbara Nancy!" her father said. She smiled at that, a sudden warm smile, then grew grave again, preoccupied with the moving procession, the flames of the torches, the bobbing heads of the crowd. "Look," her father said, and pointed. Barbara Nancy looked, but was too lost and too late.

"They didn't see us." There was disappointment in Margaret Furness's voice. She drew back from the window, almost she wept. She spoke part of her complaint aloud. "Whenever there is anything I should normally wish to see I am having a child."

Jane Hill's hands were folded and quiet in her lap. She looked down at them, not answering for a moment, detached as only the very old can be. Her hands had been full and over-full in their time: they were empty now. She looked at her daughter. Margaret's children had come too quickly, so that she was worn down by child-bearing. And she had always been rebellious. She had always been difficult to rule and sometimes difficult to understand. But not difficult to love. Always from a child Margaret had had more than her fair share of love.

It was not easy for me either, not always. In my heart I too rebelled sometimes, she wished to say.

"I would never complain," Margaret began, and at once bit back her words. If I were not so tired, she thought, and, perhaps because of that, so afraid. "There is Anna," she said, with a sudden, vehement gesture of one hand, "as serene and happy about the child that is coming to her as I am wretched about mine."

"You have been unwell from the beginning this time," her mother said. She spoke gently. Be patient, she wished to say. Be still.

"I want it over, finished," Margaret said. From too much feeling her words came only stumblingly from her lips. She got to her feet. She had always been light on her feet; though she was very near her time she was light even now. "Barbara Nancy should be indoors at this hour," she said, and paused. For whether she wished to have the child with her, or to be where Barbara Nancy was, she did not know.

"This is something the child will remember always. This is the sort of thing that only happens once in a century," her mother said. She looked out at the smoky riot of torches and the black straggling line of people winding past the lime trees. She remembered other and different processions: of bitter, hungry men. She saw again for a moment in her mind's eye the white uplifted faces, the

ragged banners, she heard again the light, dancing, precise hoofs of the police horses. Scarcely anyone riots in England now, no one goes hungry in England now, her mind went.

Margaret would have answered sharply again if she had not caught the stillness there was about her mother, and been moved by it to a quick tenderness and pity. This is old age, she told herself now—her thoughts were lightning-quick always, her moods changed with them—this waiting and remembering; this is how Great-Aunt Fan was when I saw her at Thwaites soon after we were married, when Edward and I, for the first and the last time, visited the Yorkshire Furnesses.

She sat down once more and sewed quietly. More vividly than for years all that had happened at Thwaites came flooding back into her mind.

Thwaites, both farm and hamlet, stood in an open fold of the moors, facing the sea. The house was square and grey, roofed with yellow-lichened tiles. The winds from the sea whistled through the large keyholes, blew piercingly down chimneys and under doors. The weathervane cut in the shape of a fox creaked and stirred in the wind, the smoke from the square chimneys blew all ways, then spread itself like a thin cloak over the tiles of the roof, over the fields. Old Edwin Furness, like his father and grandfather before him, had been a farmer and stockbreeder on a large scale. John Furness, Edward's elder brother, who had lived with old Edwin, had followed him. It was to Thwaites that Furnesses belonged, all except those other Furnesses who had gone into wool and cotton, into iron and steel, who had risen or fallen in the world. Old Edwin had had enough and to spare of brass; he had never envied any Furness of the clan; he had not been afraid to name some of the less reputable ones in the Methodist chapel at Allerton where he had preached hellfire and salvation on Sundays, quoting from the Latin and Greek like any Oxford man.

Aunt Fan had taken her God more gently. It was with a

mixture of humour and tenderness still that Edward spoke of her.

On hearing Aunt Fan's name for the first time, Margaret had promptly asked what she was like.

She had corkscrew curls, Edward said, that had been red once, that were almost white now; rather pale blue eyes, milky-pale. She wore purple and mauve a great deal. When John and he were small she would sing the "Ballad of the Three Maries" and the "Lament of Helen Douglas" to them on Sunday afternoons when old Edwin was asleep —Edward had laughed at this point as if he had a great deal to remember.

It was late afternoon when Edward and she had arrived. The house and the farm buildings had looked very austere and grey in the smooth folds. The moors were purplish with shadow, the leaves of the whinberries a bright shining green, the sea calm for that sea and milky-blue—"like Aunt Fan's eyes," Margaret had said. She looked up and smiled now, remembering it, and bent her head again. As they drew nearer the house an upstairs window was thrust open, a white handkerchief was waved energetically, then withdrawn. "That would be Aunt Fan," Edward had said in a contented voice.

Old Edwin had come tumbling out to meet them. He had a great head thrust forward between vast shoulders, short thick arms and legs, a grizzled look. He had seized Margaret by the waist, taken one look at her, kissed her heartily on both cheeks and set her down. "Lass, tha'rt light as a flower," he had said.

"Ah, you're warm to look at, nice and warm," Aunt Fan had said, and she had touched Margaret's cheeks and hair with butterfly flicks of her fingers that smelt of lavender and coal tar. She had looked very small and frail sitting up in the middle of the tossed and rumpled bed, a wrap like a blue and white antimacassar over her shoulders, and a black, not a mauve, band in her hair.

When at last the two women were alone, "Tell me, Meg, I'm an old woman, d'you feel you'll have children?" Aunt Fan had said.

"I'm certain of it," Margaret had answered confidently.

"Is that it? Is that so?" Aunt Fan had said, thoughtful and sighing a little. "I never had one, Meg. That's what I was always afraid of, never having any children. Lying here, though I'm eighty-two, sometimes it makes me feel that odd. Sometimes I can't bear it. So to-day I got to the bottom of the bed. Silly of me," she said, her eyes eerie and bright, "silly old woman, eh?"

"I don't think so," Margaret had said, and then, more decidedly, "I don't think so," again.

"No more do I," Aunt Fan said. "There's Kate," she went on—"John's wife. Caught again. A terrible breedy woman, Kate. And no trouble made of her lyings-in. And all five of her children boys. But she's too big for me, Kate is. I don't so much like your big lumbering women like cart horses filling the room. I like a young woman that can turn round quiet like a mouse and sit in a chair and look as if she belonged, and her feet tucked away as they ought to be, and her back straight. Like you," Aunt Fan had said suddenly. "But I'm old," she had said, twinkling again, "and Furnesses like big straddling women, love. They've always picked 'em so, excepting you and me. Your Uncle Edwin came to Wooller for me, child, a long way off, a long time ago. A fine, clean-lookin', healthy place. Edwin'll bring me back there, later, he's promised it. Why, it's all coming and going," Aunt Fan said. She had grown quiet then.

Almost immediately, it had seemed to Margaret as she left the room, Aunt Fan was asleep.

From remembering Aunt Fan she could not help but be reminded of Kate Furness also. It was not until close on supper-time that she had met Kate. They met in the dining-room, a large dark room with dark panelling and dark

curtains, a great fire flowering in the basket grate, and three candlesticks with long candles in them burning on the long table. A red setter had rushed in, dancing on its feet. Kate followed. "Get out, Nell," she said. The setter rushed out.

"You are Kate?" Margaret had said. She had come forward.

"And you are Ted's wife?" Kate said.

"I am Margaret too," Margaret replied.

The two women had looked at each other. They would never, Margaret had felt at once in an odd instantaneous recoil, be friends.

Kate was a big woman, as Aunt Fan had said. There was warmth about her too, in the gold-flecked brown eyes, in the flushed gold-flecked skin. She wore a dress of some dark red stuff cut without any pretence of fashion, and made long and full. She moved heavily and yet with a kind of suddenness, and there were gold ear-rings swinging heavily in her ears. The children had grouped themselves stolidly about their mother when they came in. They had gazed at Margaret, and missed nothing, not a coil of her hair, not a button on her shoe. We are supposed to like you—why? they appeared to ask, narrowing their eyes. She had panicked all at once. What is wrong with me? she had asked privately of herself.

The smallest of them buried his head convulsively in Kate's skirts. She picked him up. He was, so Margaret had learned afterwards, Kate's dead sister's child whom John and Kate had adopted. He had pounded Kate's shoulders with small fists. "Why, Tam," Kate had said, laughing. "Tamlin!"

"What fury!" Margaret had laughed too, from nervousness and because she felt unsure among them all. Tamlin had turned an enraged scarlet face upon her. "Go away, tha' mucky, mucky lass," he had roared, striking out with his fists at her this time, no longer at Kate.

The children had laughed; even Kate had laughed.

Although Edwin and Aunt Fan had made much of her, her visit had appeared a failure from that moment. Not only Tamlin, all the children had withheld their liking from her. And I could never bear, she thought again now, not to be liked.

She snipped twice with her scissors and drew out another embroidery thread from the white skein. Kate saw to it, she thought once more, that I remained a stranger. For a moment she allowed her hands to lie idle in her lap.

She turned now to her mother. "I was thinking about the Yorkshire Furnesses. I could never go there again, never."

Her mother looked at her in a questioning fashion.

Margaret spoke quickly, as though in self-defence. "It would be impossible for me to go again now—now that old Edwin's money has been left almost completely to John's children, even to Tamlin who is not a Furness, who belongs to Kate's family." She picked up her sewing once more and went on speaking quickly.

"It is true there is old Edwin's legacy to Barbara Nancy. Five hundred pounds for her, but only for her. It was not like Edwin to single one child out and forget the rest. Like all the Furnesses, Edwin was always fair; he was always just." She paused, then went on: "It was my fault, I know, that he remembered Barbara Nancy at all. Sometimes I blame myself. Sometimes I could almost wish he had forgotten her too."

Her mother spoke slowly. "You still think Kate was responsible for the terms of Edwin's will?"

"I am certain." Margaret sewed quickly and as though indignantly again.

She remembered how they had all been standing up at Thwaites, laughing and talking round the fire on that last night, and how old Edwin had bent forward courteously to her and spoken: "Art educated, Meg? Didst learn Latin and Greek?" The others had looked at her and waited.

"So little Latin as scarcely to count," she had answered, looking from one to the other of them as she spoke. "That's educated, for a lass," Edwin had said, contented and almost proud. "I learned nothing, Meg. I was an ignorant lad, bred to the cattle-breeding, bred to nought else. When I took to preaching I took myself to school. Why should th' Episcopalians know all the Latin and Greek? I asked. So I bought all the books and studied 'em at night. I made only a snail's pace at it, Meg, and I could never bear to be anything but quick." He had turned to Kate. "Happen one of Kate's lads'll turn scholar to please me." Margaret had interrupted him. "Why only sons?" she had said, laughing. "If I have a daughter and she has brains enough and we have money enough, she shall go to school." Old Edwin had thumped his fist upon his outstretched hand. "Edward's daughter shall have some of my brass to do it with then, that she shall," he had said. "D'you hear, Kate?" Kate had lost no time in answering. "Everything is arranged in advance for you, Meg," she had said, a flicker of temper smoothed away in an instant on her face.

Margaret got to her feet, drew the curtains, then sat down once more.

"I have never heard Edward complain," looking at her, her mother said.

"Edward has too strong a sense of family ever to make any complaints against the Furnesses," Margaret answered. She folded her hands and looked down at them and spoke with difficulty—it is always difficult, her mind went, for me to be fair. She went on speaking. "Edward says, and that also is just, that John and Kate had all the care of Aunt Fan for years, and of old Edwin himself before he died, and that Edwin's money, by right, should go to them in order to keep up Thwaites and send Kate's boys to school." She looked up. "It is like Edward to be so generous, and I don't altogether disagree. I feel more selfishly than he does, that is all." Almost as soon as she had spoken she relented. "I

don't blame old Edwin. Of course not. I am not sure that I really blame Kate. But it is an extra complication, likely to be a permanent complication, that Barbara Nancy should have a little money and the boys should have none. And I am aware of it, and apprehensive because of it, that is all."

She began to gather her sewing together. As she did so for a moment she saw old Edwin again, his eyes blue as Edward's eyes under shaggier, redder brows. He had toasted her in a glass of port that last night, standing up, his thumbs in the pockets of his grey waistcoat, his old-fashioned lapis seal dangling from his gold watch-chain. "T' lass with the delicate air, oor Ted's wife," he had said, and raised his glass. That pleased me most of all, she thought now, smiling partly at herself and partly at old Edwin again.

"I am glad I made him happy by having Barbara Nancy before he died. For it did make him happy," she said.

Because her mother's silence still held something faintly disapproving—though Jane was scarcely one to disapprove—and because her own restlessness had all at once become harder to bear, presently she went outside. When, a year ago, the terms of old Edwin's will were known to them first she had tried to justify her own attitude of mind and, she had thought, Kate's attitude also, to Edward. "I was determined Edwin should think of our children. I was right to think of them. Women must plan and scheme," she had declared. "In fairness to Kate, Kate's no schemer," Edward had said. As if Kate had not schemed, she had thought, as if Kate had not won in the end.

From this point they had disagreed about Kate, disagreed about Furnesses generally. There had been other and parallel disagreements between them after that, newly-discovered differences of temper and mood which were not easily reconciled. And none of them would have mattered, she thought again now, if we were given to quarrelling; if we had ever quarrelled greatly before.

She moved on away from the shadow of the house into

the garden. There were layers of quiet in the dusk, layers of darkness too, quiet falling down like snow—she stretched out a hand—darkness like small fine rain. And I expected, she said and spoke half-aloud, that marriage would be all harmony, like singing in tune.

She walked on, past the kestrel, sleepless still in its wire cage, past the fuchsia hedge, between the red-brick walls. Scents were faint, of pinks, of ten-day stocks; the foxgloves showered their raindrops on her feet as she brushed past; the petals from the Maréchal Neal rose trained along one wall fell suddenly in a shower. She paused by the well seat, then sat down. The wood was warm to the touch still, and rough and lined like an old dry hand. Under the wood was the well-water, mirror-dark; under that, unseen, unheard, the gentle, never-ceasing flow of the spring. She had often sat here in the past few months; here was forgetfulness, she had thought idly enough at first, here was something deeper than sleep. In time, as the differences between Edward and herself appeared sharper, as the dread of this new pregnancy grew, and her despair with it, the thought, by a kind of repetition, had thrust deeper in until it all but possessed her mind. She had resisted it. However far I go in melancholy I can always bring myself safely back, she had told herself. But fear had remained. I am afraid, she thought, quite simply afraid, of to-night, of any hour, any moment now; I am afraid for myself and the child. And my fear is all the greater since Edward and I are so queerly separated by my fear. I am not content with kindness. It is not enough for me that Edward should be anxious on my account. I would have everything between us as it was before, when I was unaware of my own moods, when neither the Furnesses nor anything else divided us. I did not want this child. Perhaps it is my resentment, or what Edward feels is my resentment, that divides us? Perhaps it is this struggle in me, this wanting the child and not wanting it, that makes me afraid?

She lifted both hands to her hair, then allowed her hands to fall idly again. In the stillness the warmth was too heavy, too close about her. The fuchsia flowers drooped their blue and coral cups, the light was glossy and dark on the pointed leaves. Thought grew passionate and sullen in her now. I want him; I want my husband within sight, within touch. If we could be quiet together for a little while, I could be peaceful then, I could be confident then. She turned to come in.

As she passed, the bird stirred in its cage. On an impulse she laid a hand on the wire door. With a blank hawk's stare the bird looked past her into the dusk that was feather-grey. It had no fear of her, no fear of any of them now. It would eat from Edward's hand, ride like a falcon on his wrist. On an impulse that had something of fellow-feeling in it, Margaret spoke aloud: "Would you be free if you could?" The sparrows stirred in their nest under the eaves; the hawk's gaze shifted, the bird stiffened and seemed to wait, one foot that had drooped, half-hidden in the feathers of its breast, coming down stealthily once more on to the wooden perch. Margaret opened the door. The bird no more than half-ran clumsily at first along the path. It flew a little way then and perched motionless on a post, like an owl in the dusk. Scents came to it now, perhaps some stirring of things in the wood and the wider air. Suddenly, with a broad lift of wings it flew, then soared, mounting higher than the tops of the trees.

Margaret watched until the bird appeared no more than a small speck in an immensity of sky, climbing against the falling light of the sun, and travelling far. She turned finally then and came in. She sat down in the room in the dusk that was not yet dark but full of shadows. If I had not wasted time and kindness, her mind went monotonously, if I had not, so often and so disagreeably, thrust all pleasantness between us away. Her mother, who had scarcely looked at her or stirred as she came in, leaned forward now, and with-

out speaking, with an infinite slow gentleness, touched a handkerchief to her closed eyes, smoothing, it seemed to Margaret for a moment, fret and even thought itself away.

By the gate leading to the local great house a large crowd was gathered. There were children couched like small leopards along the overhanging branches of the trees; there were more children perched like larger sparrows in the shallow embrasures on either side. The band could now and then be heard, the sound of the music faint and disappearing like a trail of smoke over the gently sloping fields.

Brock Doddington, wedged in one of the embrasures between John and Robert Furness, fidgeted, crossing and uncrossing his legs. "Oh, be still, boy, do," Rosa Fairey rebuked him in grown-up tones.

Rosa was twelve: she was here first of all on her own account, after that she was here in order to take care of Brock Doddington. Brock could not ignore her, for Rosa was masterful and intent on being obeyed; instead he affected to despise her as he affected to despise everyone set in authority over him. He was a small solitary boy who lived much in his own tense thoughts and feelings. He was not very much interested in the band or the procession. Only two things were of importance to him at this moment: his anxiety for his mother, his detestation of his Aunt Ellen. Even more than his grandmother it was his Aunt Ellen who made his mother unhappy, he was convinced of that. He detested his Aunt Ellen on his own account also for all the sly tweaks and slaps she bestowed upon him. "Frog-face," she had called him only that morning, and her red podgy fingers had fastened in a mock-jovial manner upon his nose. "Frog-face," young Robert Furness had repeated only five minutes ago. "Sit still, Frog-face, or we'll make you stand." Then it must be true, Brock had told himself in a sick fashion. But John Furness, whom they called the Fisherman,

had slapped his knee kindly: "You can look like a frog without being one, Frog-face, you know."

Johnny Brock, they called him also. "Why did you call me Brock?" he had asked this morning standing very still by his mother's bed. "Such a silly sort of snob-name," he had said. "They think I am like my name." Not daring to stay any longer for fear his calm should desert him, he had marched out then. "Get the child out of the house," he had heard his Granny Tufton say that morning before he was dressed. "I'll have Nurse Bingham only," his mother had told his Granny Tufton. "I'll have neither you nor Ellen with me." At the weakness and pain in his mother's voice he had fumbled with his socks and grown sick again.

"Your mother is having a new baby," Rosa had announced in an interested but casual fashion, going off with him that evening and swinging his hand in hers. "I knew all about it long before Nurse Bingham started to come." Rosa had tossed her head as she spoke. When she did so her hair, which was straight and yellow and fine, swung and hit her nose. He had said nothing: watching Rosa's hair swing he had thought scarcely at all; in an odd way that had no certainty about it, he also had known. He had wished afterwards to run away from Rosa, to hide in the wood, simply to run away from them all and hide. He sat on, stoical as children are, tormented as children often are, by a half-knowledge of things they do not understand.

"Frogs," declared young Robert—the Philosopher, his father called him from his habit of making sage remarks—"frogs are made to be eaten. By owls, kestrels, herons, big fish and the rest. That's all the good frogs are." He cast a sidelong look at Brock out of mischievous greenish-grey eyes. Brock caught the look but allowed not a ripple of feeling to stir. A small bird hopped down in steps from the centre bough of one of the trees and chirruped suddenly. "Chirrup, chirrup," came from young Robert as he threw

back his head and chirruped like the bird. Everyone laughed then; the Fisherman opened his mouth in a round O and shook silently. For what young Robert said and did, from the unexpectedness of it all, often passed for wit.

"Don't you be sick when the band comes, Johnny Brock, don't you," Rosa felt it her duty to say. "He's always sick," she declared to the world at large, "sick as sick."

"I'm not sick on you," Brock said.

"Here they come," Rosa declared. "See the Conquering Hero Comes," she half-hummed, half-sang, beating time with one foot and confusing words and tune. "Up and at him with your guns."

"That's not it," Brock affirmed loudly.

No one noticed him. The noise grew louder, the crowd vibrated as Rosa vibrated, the usual small brown mongrel dog, with a frill of red, white and blue ribbons round its neck, danced on its hind feet; the trees drooped stilly, the oncoming torches made a ragged pattern of black and flame.

Because I'm small I'm not seen and I'm not heard: Brock nursed the stoicism of his own thought. He too vibrated, but with a different excitement, cold runnels of anticipation chasing each other down his spine. When they come, those two, just wait, he told himself, just wait. In his other hand was a small sharp stone. He had lit upon it by chance in the timber yard a week ago. It was queer, not like any other stone. That is my stone, he had thought. It looked like black glass, it grew warm when he did, cold when he grew cold, it had a sharp edge, it bit into his pockets like glass. Van dook, van dook, a bird sang when he found the stone, a brown bird perched on one of the timber piles, its pointed tongue showing, something sharp like an adam's apple moving up and down in its throat. Van Dook'll cut like a knife, Brock thought, it'll cut and cut. He stayed so concentrated and still that Rosa forgot him for a moment and took away her hand.

The Fisherman, to whom an idea had occurred all at once, slid suddenly to the ground. There was more room now on the stone seat.

"Watch me. I'm a Buddha. This is my temple. There is my congregation." Young Robert lifted both hands and turned them palm outwards. His heavy lids drooped over sleepy eyes; he sat cross-legged, Buddha-fashion.

"What's a Buddha? Oh, you're silly, oh, I've no patience. Boys are silly, I never want to get married," Rosa said.

"Ha, ha, chance is a fine thing," the Buddha rather rudely said. He spoke down his nose croakingly, because, being a Buddha, he dared not open his mouth wide.

"Oh, they're coming, oh." Rosa danced, then twisted suddenly. "I've got some tickles all down my back. Oh, I believe they're flying ants," wriggling, she said.

"Flying uncles, you mean," the Buddha said, and—a trick of his—he moved both eyebrows and at the same time very slightly waggled both ears.

The Fisherman leaned back and looked out of narrowed eyes at an overhanging branch of a beech tree. "I could lie out on that branch, bet you I could, and see everything," he said.

The Buddha also looked up. "Bet you'd fall off, bet you sixpence," he said.

The Fisherman, without speaking, saw to the S-shaped buckle of his belt, eased the seat of his short trousers, smoothed back his hair, trimmed back his ears, which were humorous and large, put his cap in his pocket, and disappeared. In the next moment he was shinning with queer soft slurring sounds up the tree.

"Sylvus fugaticus," young Robert, no longer a Buddha, remarked, looking up once more. He addressed Rosa. "You're ignorant, my wench. That's Latin. That means beech tree."

Rosa stood on one leg like a tom-tit, then hopped on it. "That's not Latin. What's Latin?" she said out of only

one part of her mind. Like most women, Rosa would contradict and be right, even when she did not know.

But Johnny Brock listened and condemned them all, and, trembling, held on to his seat and the stone with the sharp edge.

The Fisherman had scarcely reached his place on the branch amid a shower of dead twigs and silken scraps of leaves when the band, the procession, and the hero himself in his man-drawn carriage arrived. Like a sudden dark billow of water the crowd surged forward under the sign "Welcome Home" which, inscribed in laurel leaves on a white cotton-wool background, was suspended over the closed gates.

Mr. Timothy Fountain, High Bailiff of Sigbarrow, was clearing his throat preparatory to delivering an address of welcome when Seth pushed to the front with Ellen hanging upon his arm. Her black eyes were lively as tadpoles with delight, her round firm cheeks were scarlet as the feather in her squash beefeater's hat, her bosom heaved as if she would shiver all the rows of red and gilt buttons on her tight black bodice. In a peak of exaltation Brock scrambled to his feet in the small embrasure; he lifted an arm; he hurled his stone. Unfailingly Van Dook found its mark. Ellen clapped a hand to her cheek, then, as if by an afterthought, screamed.

"Van Dook, Van Dook," Brock cried, standing up, a small figure in a neat coat that was too long for him, in a genteel peaked cap that was two sizes too large. Scarcely anyone noticed, and not one of those who heard could interpret what he said. Like bees disturbed, the crowd set up a confused murmur; the Fisherman, leaning and peering round his branch in amazement, leaned and peered too far. Like a catapult, the bough, which was pliant and young, tossed him wide; like a hard green apple he landed full in the midst of the triumphal carriage. A shout went up then; a dozen separate voices could be heard; a dozen pairs of hands reached out and plucked at the Fisherman. Grasped

by the seat of his short trousers, he turned pugnacious and fought unavailingly. Up-ended as he was, he slipped the clasp of his belt; minus his trousers he jumped clear, then doubled and twisted through the edge of the crowd.

"Let him go," "Leave him be," "Well done, young 'un," were a few of the shouts he heard. But Barbara Nancy, on seeing him, let out a small wail of protest; her legs draped round her father's neck beat an anguished tattoo against his chest. Casting a fierce and despairing look over his shoulder, the Fisherman ran on, through a shower of friendly cuffs and claps, to the ditch and comparative safety. The cow parsnip bent over and tickled his face, the nettles stung his legs, his buttocks burned from all the slaps that had been bestowed upon them. This would mean a hiding, and he would have to pay sixpence to the Philosopher, and you could lose everything but your trousers and never mind, he thought; and he hadn't thrown the stone, so why was he running away? Here he paused to hold down his shirt tails. He ran on once more, but not so fast now. Worst of all, he thought again, young Robert would have the right to crow over him. From consternation he slowed down to a walk.

Still in the friendly cover of the ditch the Fisherman arrived home at about the same time that Johnny Brock, scuffled across the field by a secretly delighted Rosa, arrived at the entrance to the timber yard.

A bumble bee had flown in at the window. Now, buzzing loudly, it climbed steeply against a pane of glass, and, falling back repeatedly, like Bruce's spider, climbed and climbed once more.

"A bumble bee—a stranger. That will be Nurse Bingham," Margaret said and smiled faintly.

"Not only Nurse Bingham, it is to be hoped," her mother said.

"Anna hopes for a sister for Brock. But I should like another son," Margaret said.

His tongue lolling out, the Fisherman came running in at the door. Bit by bit, in short, uncompromising sentences, the truth came out while his mother exclaimed, ran her hands over him, then exclaimed again at the nettle spots and the stinging red marks. I'm a horse, the Fisherman thought, standing patient and still at last, I am one of the timber horses. It would have been fun to neigh suddenly as the Philosopher might have done, except that he did not wish to neigh, he never wished to do what young Robert or anyone else might wish to do. I was a silly to fall out of that tree, he told himself. "I'll get my breeks back, sure to," he said.

"Well, it hasn't killed you," twinkling at him, his Granny Hill said.

He felt grateful to her and, almost at once, bold as well. He jerked his head towards the room upstairs and spoke to his mother. "You'll come up before I go to sleep?"

He retreated a step or two, holding the tails of his shirt as he did so because of his Granny Hill. "You will come?" he said to his mother again, more anxiously.

"But, dear heart, I may be busy," his mother said. His head drooped. "Oh, I'll come," she said, "I'll come," standing up then, a warmth that he recognized, that was for him and for him only this time, in her voice. Suddenly matter-of-fact he nodded. He turned then. The wind up the stairs felt cold under his shirt.

There was a knock on the garden door. Biddy Gorrall, the youngest of the Gorralls, stood there. Her words came in a rush: "Please to say Mrs. Doddington has a little baby girl and it's dead. Mrs. Furness to please to come if she can." Biddy ran away then. The Fisherman could hear her feet in their hob-nailed boots clattering over the stones. He got out of bed and peered downstairs over the curving banisters. "I'll go at once," he heard his mother say. She came into the small hallway and reached for her cloak.

"No, I can't," he heard her say. And she caught back her breath as if she were in pain.

She stayed as she was for a moment. Now, as if the pain had passed, her hand and arm came down very slowly to her side. His Granny Hill came out. "You go, please go. Anna must have someone," his mother said to his Granny Hill, her face twisted as if she were hurt again.

He ran into his room once more, into his bed; he pulled the clothes quickly up to his chin; between the cool sheets he lay stretched out and burning in the dark. She was to be busy, his mother had said. He sat up presently; he lit a candle; he reached for his collection of birds' eggs; he touched each one. If I had a nightjar's egg, or a merlin's egg, his mind went, the familiar thought, the familiar cool touch of each separate egg comforting him.

His daughter on his shoulder, Edward Furness swung in at the door.

He glanced at his wife, then set the child down abruptly upon the couch.

"I wanted you." Margaret spoke quietly. She stayed challenging and quiet, standing up against the light.

Edward moved suddenly. "Why didn't you say? Or must I always know?"

Set down so sharply upon the couch, Barbara Nancy rubbed her eyes. She had been almost asleep; she wished to be almost asleep again. Before her eyes even yet were the smoke and flame of the torches, the dark trees.

"When you are angry with me you know and care nothing. Another time you would have known," Margaret said.

"When we spoke last I was a monster of selfishness," her husband said. "You say too much at these times. Too much for us both. How is any man to feel certain of what you want or what you feel?"

"I set the bird free," Margaret said. She moved as

though indifferently towards the door. "I didn't know why." She paused. "I know now."

"I know too." Edward spoke quietly, without moving. "You yourself are not free. I imprison you. The very fact that you are a woman imprisons you. Isn't that what you said an hour or two ago?"

"I never remember what I say," Margaret said.

Edward looked at her. "You'll never change," he said. "You must have professions of love, reassurances always. I did the simplest thing for us both, I thought. I left you with your mother." He waited. Margaret did not speak. "God knows she's wise enough," he said, "she's lived long enough to be wise."

"You left me with my own thoughts," Margaret answered. "It is possible to be afraid of one's thoughts. That is something you will never understand." Some quality of unyieldingness about her even yet, she began to climb the stairs.

"The bird will come back if I whistle for her," Edward said. He moved then. He looked away from his wife. For a second it was as if he had taken his mind away.

Margaret halted, a sudden relentingness, an odd humour that was partly satirical also upon her face. If you whistled I should come back too, is that what you are thinking? her look seemed to say.

Edward came nearer. He put a hand on the stair rail. "You take nothing on trust. If I have no love for you, if that is what you tell yourself, whom else do I love? Answer me that."

On the couch Barbara Nancy wept softly, rubbing her eyes.

"You should know," Edward said. "By this time you should know and understand." He came nearer still. "Even if you do blame me for this child?"

"I don't blame you," Margaret answered. "But I am afraid this time. I have been afraid for a long while now."

Out of pity for herself and a sense of her own helplessness

also, she wept then. And Barbara Nancy halted her own tears and looked at her, wet smudges on her cheeks.

Jane, coming in once more from the Doddingtons, paused and listened. The Fisherman, his door ajar, brought his finger and thumb together suddenly, and the egg, a sparrow-hawk's egg, broke in his hand. Everything's beastly: I can't ever mend it, he thought, staring down at the crushed thing in his hand.

"Never be afraid, never," they heard Edward say. And after that a low murmur of words. There was silence then. Now they could hear his feet sounding careful and slow as he carried her up the stairs.

His hands behind his back, young Robert sauntered home. If he licks the Fisherman he'll lick me, just to make sure, he thought, just in case I am partly to blame. No need to hurry therefore, young Robert's mind said.

"You young hound!" his father would say, coming up the stairs and standing erect and sharp by the open door. "You young hounds!" trailing the shaving-strop and coming in and addressing them both, and looking and speaking a good deal fiercer than he felt. "Two strokes apiece, get ready, sharp," it would be. "I wish I had scales where I sit down," the Fisherman had once said. When the writhing and rubbing, the two or three seconds of howling were over—you howled because it was the thing to do and because you were indignant rather than because you were hurt—there would descend upon you and upon the house, from all the queer mixed feelings a hiding gave you, an odd kind of peace.

"When I have a couple of kids I'll wallop them." Confident of posterity, young Robert spoke cheerfully and aloud, and stooping to pick up a stick, he smote off the heads of two nettles that lay across the path. There was no one about, there were only the trees, drooping and still; and the swifts, the jacky-squealers, flying low over the road, then

up, straight as arrows, under the house eaves; and the moon, immense, milky, full like a pigeon's egg in the pale sky, shining between the million yellow-green leaves of the lime trees.

CHAPTER TWO

CHORUS OF VOICES

JULY came and the look of the fields and the skies above them changed. Henry Furness, born on the morning following Mafeking night, was christened. He cried lustily: he grew fat. The birds flew differently about the fields; the winds took holiday; even the river moved to a different tune. Margaret stepped lightly over the path that led to the Doddingtons' house, all her restlessness and discontent behind her now with all the other events of Mafeking night. Everything connects, my world revolves round me once more, I am happy, her mind went—she thrust open the gate of the timber yard—but in another moment I shall see Anna; in another moment I shall be in a different country.

It happened by chance, of course, as Margaret left the house that Mrs. Dummett who kept the post office at Alne was having her early afternoon cup of tea, seated in the small window that looked out on the field. By chance also, Mrs. Daffin, the waggoner's wife, and Clarice Odell, the carpenter's wife, had chosen to join her that day and had brought Pleasaunce Wayte, Mrs. Odell's niece, with them. Pleasaunce was a tall young woman with a dropped jaw and the look of a hare. Mrs. Daffin was purposeful, and brown, and iron-grey. She had blue staring eyes, and a large brown mole on her chin from which sprouted three stiff white hairs. There was no hair on the rest of her face

—which was a peculiar thing, considering—her friend, Mrs. Odell, had just said. There was something acid about Mrs. Odell, something lugubrious and unbending as well. How Clarice Odell could be such friends with Grace Daffin was beyond her, Mrs. Dummett frequently said, for they were as different as chalk from cheese.

Ada Dummett herself was round and soft. She had a curiously melting look, as if at any moment she would dissolve into sighs or tears. The late Postman Dummett had been killed one Christmas Day, chased round and round a large tree by an enraged red deer. Mrs. Dummett would refer to Mr. Dummett at regular intervals to the tobacco man and the boiled sweets man, for the Post Office, as was almost inevitable, had by degrees grown also into the village shop. "I think it's only fair to warn them all off, like, because I never could forget George," she would say afterwards to her friend, Grace Daffin, fingering the small blotched photograph of George Dummett in the gold locket that hung around her neck. "If you don't want no more double 'arness, you don't, Ada," Mrs. Daffin would answer. "But being a widow 'ud never be my fort-ey. A poor mixed-up neither the one thing nor the other sort o' state."

"It must have been a devil that got into that red deer that chased my poor George," Mrs. Dummett, not for the first time by any means, declared now.

"Ah, it wasn't October, was it?" Mrs. Daffin, smoothing her cuffs, said. "In October, o' course, there's no sayin' what deer'll do when the spirit's in 'em. If you can call it a spirit."

"I've heard tell," Pleasaunce Wayte said, "of a woman that had a child by a devil that lived in a tree. A forked tail the devil had, red like a fox's tail, and they say the child had webs on his toes, and could swim like a fish."

"A fox! And webs! Why, what a rigmarole! Why, I don't know, to be sure," Mrs. Daffin, her eyes sparkling with enjoyment, said.

"It's what I did hear," Pleasaunce said, bridling. "And I know a man, a third cousin of my old auntie that used to live at Chichester, he was, who thought his wife turned into a white rabbit o' nights, and he thrust her through the heart with a hazel twig and was hanged at Michaelmas."

"Well, that might be true, the poor soul. Michaelmas! He must have been touched," Mrs. Daffin, out of an obvious confusion of thought, remarked.

Mrs. Odell, who had been silently blowing on her tea all this time, in sudden interest laid down her cup. "There's Mrs. Furness off to the Tuftons', I'll be bound."

Pleasaunce gazed after Margaret. "They do say Bridget Tufton is a witch."

"I wouldn't offend that woman, not if it was whatever," Mrs. Odell declared positively. "She makes me feel right down oncomfortable, Bridget Tufton does."

"Oh don't talk to me about her, don't," Mrs. Dummett said, her eyes melting, her hands trembling suddenly, Dummett's gold locket heaving like a lifebuoy in a sudden swell on her chest. "Some more tea, Grace, do," she said, and got up.

"I don't mind, Ada." Mrs. Daffin, having handed over her cup, sat back. "When Jakes Mucklow, Tom Mucklow's boy, had the yellow janders, he swore he saw Bridget Tufton swish through one o' them lime trees on a black broomstick. But that was the janders, o' course, that was. It makes you see things rarely, the janders does." Mrs. Daffin paused contemplatively.

"The poor critter do look poorly and broody and no mistake," Pleasaunce said. "She've never got over losing that child."

"Mrs. Doddington you've got to now, o' course. How you do 'op about, Pleasaunce," Mrs. Daffin said. "Now don't anybody go tellin' me there's death in Anna Doddington's face. There was death in Master Grumm's face they all said, and as everybody in this village knows, his wife's

just had twins. And Ivy Grumm as faithful a woman as ever was brought to bed."

"I never said a thing about faithful, or about Ivy Grumm," Pleasaunce, who was easily out of her depth, complained. "Oh, here's a eary-wig," she declared, jumping and moving her chair as far as possible away from the geraniums in their pots.

"You're not a-listenin' to what I'm a-sayin', that's very plain," Mrs. Daffin said. "Earywigs don't hurt yer, Pleasaunce, poor scattery creatures. As for Anna Doddington, she've allays had that creamy-yallery look, and them dark eyes like the bottom of a well. Greenish too, haven't you ever noticed 'em, Clarice?" Here she appealed to Mrs. Odell, who nodded. "Drown in 'em, you could, my husband says. Old as he is, he've a regular passion for them ripe blackberry sort of eyes."

"Seth Doddington's finished drownin' in 'em, to all appearances, seemin'ly," Mrs. Odell remarked and sniffed. "Drownin' 'isself somewhere else not so far off he is, if you ask me. And Ellen Tufton married these six months."

"I must say I was surprised at that wedding. Her with a veil." Mrs. Dummett spoke stiffly. "Oh, I've no patience wi' veils at Ellen Tufton's age."

"And him such a poor dressed-up little teazle," Mrs. Daffin remarked cheerfully. "Soon as I set eyes on him—ah, it'll never do, I said. There's nothing to him now, and Ellen Tufton won't leave him anything left of what there is. Why, you can see it about her. Just a convenience, commercial traveller or not, Peaslake or whatever his name is, I said. And it's my belief he knows it, looking over his shoulder all the time in church he was as if he wished the door 'ud open so he could bolt out. Like a rat in a rickyard the man was. But Sexton had the door shut tight so as he could sleep behind the bell ropes as he allays does. A scandal that man is, the bell ought to fall on him," Mrs. Daffin said.

"I heard her stays creak," Pleasaunce declared excitedly.

"Her stays allays did creak. And no wonder," Mrs. Daffin remarked cryptically.

"I'm sure what is to be will be." Grown suddenly austere, Mrs. Odell got to her feet. "Pleasaunce, if you please to come," she said.

"If you've finished your tea, Clarice, I haven't." Mrs. Daffin sat on comfortably.

The postmistress returned from seeing her two visitors off. She dusted the scales, banged down the weights, laid the brass spoon, with which she was wont to reach to the bottom of the sweet-jars, in its place on the right of the scales, and sat down again.

"I can't a-bear to hear Bridget Tufton talked of." She spread her hands in her lap and looked at them as if she had a great deal more that she wished to say. "But that Pleasaunce Wayte is not to be trusted, Grace. Such a silly head."

"That's right. That's quite right." Mrs. Daffin nodded and waited expectantly.

"I'd not say a word about Bridget Tufton if I wasn't certain. But, Grace"—here Mrs. Dummett drew a deep breath—"every word I'm a-going to tell you is true. We come through that bit of a wood by the Tuftons' house years ago, the last year Robert Tufton was alive, Jane Fairey and me, and we see him, Robert Tufton, there. It was a Sunday and he wasn't shaved and he hadn't a collar on, which wasn't like him. There was a queerish look I didn't altogether like on his face. You know he'd allays got the brightest o' dark eyes. But he looked ill then and there wasn't no sort o' light in his eyes or on his face.

"He spoke to Jane; he took no notice of me. Jane and him were sweethearts once afore Bridget came along. 'I'm a Christian man, Jane,' he says, 'and I've borne enough. Shall I bear any more?'

" 'Of course,' Jane says, cheerful and humouring him.

'Once you've begun to bear things you can go on bearing 'em, Robert. They don't get no worse.'

"'But they do,' he says. He starts trembling then as if he'd got the ague in his limbs.

"'It's best to forgive,' Jane says, steady as if he was a child. 'You're at peace then.'

"'There's peace and a sword. You can have too much peace,' he says. He looks at Jane, peculiar-like. 'I always thought too much of peace,' he says.

"'What's done is done. And it's too late to change now,' she says. She sounded put out suddenly, something I never saw in her before. She looks at him then, pitiful, as if he was her own husband, and a bit sharp as well. 'Ah, go in, man,' she says.

"'Peace, there's no peace,' he says, and he claps one hand on his chest. 'Peace is with the dead and dead's stone cold.'

"'You don't want to be dead, I know,' Jane says, reasonable again.

"'Oh, but I do,' he answers her. 'And whether I'll sleep or whether I'll wake I don't know. Blessed are they that sleep,' he says, oh, cunning-like and so strange. He goes off quietly then. He's touched, I thought, for I didn't know what to think. 'He's touched,' I said afterwards to Jane. 'He is, just this minute,' Jane says. 'But he can see the truth for all that.'

"You know what happened to him about that time, how he seemed to know nothing and nobody, he was so full of heaviness, and how he'd sleep all day. There was some queer tales going about concerning him and Bridget at the finish. Not that I believe 'em, I don't. There's worse things than spells and the rest. 'Twas downright wicked unkindness that killed him, Grace," Mrs. Dummett said, and paused.

Mrs. Daffin drew a deep judicial breath. At last she said: "I don't think so much to Bridget Tufton as you do. Neither for nor against. She's one of them that can't get on smooth

with other folk and likes to take her fun in frightenin' them instead. It 'ud give her all the pleasure in the world to hear you and Pleasaunce Wayte talk."

Mrs. Dummett interrupted her. She leaned forward. "But I didn't tell you all of it, Grace. When Robert Tufton had gone in she comes out. 'Good evening,' she says to Jane and me as grand as you please—I can see her now—'What can I do for you?'

"'There's nothing you can do, thanking you, and good day to you,' Jane says. She's got a nice dignified way with her sometimes, Jane Fairey has. We went off then, kicking up our skirts at the hem to spite her as we went. At least I know I did."

"I don't care for that brush braid," Mrs. Daffin said. "Picks up all the dirt it does when you kick up and step out with it." She leaned down beside her chair and reached thoughtfully for her basket.

"I never cared so much for Robert Tufton meself," she declared again on her way to the door. "Such a queer, awkward, onaccountable, moody feller as he always was." At the door she paused. "Bridget was gay enough when he married her. No doubt about that. Afterwards, when he got jealous and she got overbearing, they were like two knives rubbing together. D'you remember, Ada, how before she married Tufton she used to dance? By herself, too, like a gipsy whirling about. 'Look at me,' she'd say, dizzying round till my head turned. 'Come and try, Grace,' she'd say, 'only come and try.' You'll not like me for it, Ada, but Bridget Tufton might be more sinned against than sinning. Come to consider it, she ought never to have married Tufton, but he pretty well haunted her then, and you might say he haunts her now. The truth is I like a man with a few laughs in him, and it's my belief so did she. But she got him that wouldn't laugh not if it was to save his life, as it might ha' done, and she turned queer and loose about it and is queer still. Not that they wasn't good enough to

each other at one time, they was." Here Mrs. Daffin shifted her basket from one arm to the other. "Well, Ada," she said finally—she was at the gate now, Mrs. Dummett following her—"we shall see what we shall see."

"That's what Clarice Odell said." Mrs. Dummett stood by the gate for a moment and gazed after her friend.

Anna walked with Margaret between the small flowerbeds towards the wood. "Is it wrong to grieve?" she asked. "Everyone tells me so."

"It is unwise to be so much alone," after a moment Margaret said. She put a hand in Anna's arm. "Why do you not come and see me more often?"

"I must," Anna said. She spoke lightly enough. "Oh, I will. But—do ghosts go visiting? I feel like a ghost sometimes." She stooped and picked a white clove carnation and held it to her lips. It showed dead white against the yellowish pallor of her face.

They sat down just inside the wood. Her hands clasped about her knees, Anna stayed listless now and still. There was no sound, only the sleepy cooing of the wood pigeons overhead and the faint stir of the leaves. While Margaret sought in her mind for comfort a red ant came and, after an immense effort, carried away a crumb which was much larger than itself. It was as though it carried the earth between its feet.

She spoke then. "But, Anna, your disappointment over this child will grow less with time, perhaps with only a little time."

"In time, yes," Anna said. She looked at Margaret and spoke quietly. "And the attraction between Seth and Ellen will go on, I know, for all Ellen's marriage, until that wears itself out too, in time. There's no comfort in time."

"Seth and Ellen have always made much of each other," Margaret persisted. "I remember how it was with them when I met you first."

"At Frost Fair?" Anna's face brightened for a moment. She spoke irrelevantly. "I looked at you for a long time," she said.

"Ellen is one of those people one can never know. Apart from being vulgar, what is she like? I wondered then what she was like," Margaret said.

"She is not like my mother," Anna answered. "She is not like Robert Tufton either. He was a quiet man, tall and stooped. He had the sort of face you could carve in stone, not wood. The sort of face you see carved on church tombs. A cold, not a hard face," Anna said. She stopped short. She spoke simply then. "I dislike Ellen so much I can't tell what she is like."

"Quite suddenly this coil between you has grown so much worse. Why?" Margaret asked.

"Not suddenly. It doesn't begin with Seth or with me," Anna said.

"But that is nonsense," Margaret protested.

"How does one know when anything begins?" Anna said. Margaret did not speak. Anna went on. "Have I never told you that once, long ago, I found Robert Tufton leaning his arms against one of those trees?" Again she pointed, and again Margaret only vaguely followed the direction of her hand. "He was crying, I am certain of that. I did no more than creep away. Afterwards he beat me for nothing, and I was almost glad. I had an odd feeling that he needed to beat me. I was twelve then," Anna said. "All those years ago. He was kind to me always except that once. I might have loved him," she said again, "I didn't, somehow." She looked at Margaret once more as if expecting her to speak, then once more leaned her head on her knees. "I have never loved anyone but Seth. Seth is solid, I told myself when we married, he'll never leave me, he'll never take flight to any kind of unhappy place. But nowadays, when I see him with Ellen, what if he has already left me? I ask myself." Once more she turned her head, and once more

Margaret, frowning a little, lips pursed a little, did not speak.

"I don't know why I am telling you this," Anna said. "When I talk I grow garrulous, like someone who lives alone." She stopped short suddenly.

At once Margaret became aware of Bridget standing a little distance away from them between the trees and looking at them, her white apron lifting over her dark skirts, a bundle of sticks under one arm.

Anna stood up in the same second, and with a not very steady hand smoothed her dress. In the next instant Bridget turned and, as though defiantly, walked away.

"She is always watching me, nowadays, always," Anna said. "If I complain to Seth, he answers me comfortably, 'You are too fanciful. Your mother means well. Your mother always means well.' " She turned to Margaret. She spoke passionately.

"If I could get away," she said, "if I could only go away and leave this place."

PART III

"GOLDEN IS THE LIGHT OF THE SUN"

CHAPTER ONE

THE RIVER

THE day, the twenty-fourth of July, nineteen hundred and six, was hot; the wind itself was hot, blowing dustily and with a curious strength from the south. "I don't like this day," Barbara Nancy said, coming slowly up the long passage-way between the houses, just touching her hands on the stones that were always cold. She stood for a moment in the cool of the archway before going out again into the sun, a small thin child with long black-stockinged legs, a flowered frock, and bronze-brown hair that was dragged off her face and never allowed to curl and tied with a black velvet ribbon on top of her head. There was a smudge of tears and dirt on her pink moist face. The stones of the yard where the roof sloped down almost to the stones were cool-looking and grey; the ferns on the wall, the fringe of yellow flowers by the wall made clear sharp shadows in the sun. Barbara Nancy, having many people to talk to but no one very much to answer her, talked to herself and answered herself too. "I don't like to-day because of the dust," she said. It did not even sound true. "I don't like to-day because of them," she should have said. That was true. She turned into the house, and paused by the sitting-room door. "When I am nine shall I be as old as Mafooselah?" she asked.

Her father put down his newspaper. "Why?"

"I'm nine a-Sunday," Barbara Nancy said. She looked at her father out of eyes that were cranesbill blue like his eyes and much too large for her face.

"Nine on Sunday," her mother corrected her. She was standing on a tall stool putting away jam in the cupboard beside the fire.

"Nine a-Sunday," Barbara Nancy said patiently again. This time no one corrected her.

"You've a dirty face," her father remarked thoughtfully.

"I cried." Barbara Nancy was truthful and flat.

"And you're going with them?" her father said, nodding.

Barbara Nancy struggled to speak. She wished to say No, and could not. She hated to say Yes. She had wished to go to the river with them; they had not wanted her, neither the Fisherman, nor Robert, nor Tamlin. Least of all Tamlin. Even Brock Doddington had appeared not to want her. He was afraid to speak up for her; he, too, wished to be like them. There was the river, she had thought, and there, more exciting than the river, was all that they might do. Beside what they might do, everything else seemed dull. Dolls—you grew tired of dolls. You dressed them up, you made queens of them, and, as always seemed to happen to queens, you cut off their heads. Rabbits ate even one's hair; no rabbit ever talked. Doves had only one thing to say—"Cr-oo, cr-oooo," a sound that made the garden quieter, the day longer, the emptiness that was spreading and dark like an ink stain on one's chest harder to bear. They had not wanted her, they did not want her now. Secretly she knew it and was ashamed. Confronted by tears and reproaches, they had agreed to have her with them only grudgingly. She who never cried, never moaned—"I don't cry, I don't moan"—had wept and reproached them: "I let you tomahawk me."

"I let them tomahawk me," she said now.

"Good God!" her father said.

"Only paper-pretend," Barbara Nancy said. The tomahawk had been of cardboard only; Tamlin had made it, and laughed, and left them to tomahawk her, and gone away. Barbara Nancy moved slowly towards the door.

They didn't want her; for all that she could not keep away. Before Tamlin came they had wanted her; all this, she paused, her hand fiddling with the brass knob of the door, was due to Tamlin.

"So you're off," her father said, watching her, quizzing a little. "And you are not coming bird's-nesting with me? Five sparrow eggs," he said, tempting her, "in a nest in a hollow post?"

Barbara Nancy did not speak. Very slowly she shook her head. She turned the knob and moved away slowly once more into the sun. Once in the shade she ran fast. "I will go with them, I will," her mind, and her feet also, said.

"Rejected." Her father sighed, a comical, an amused sigh.

"Small Henry should have been a girl. Then the two of them would have seemed more of an age," Margaret observed, stepping down from the stool. Now she spoke of her youngest child.

"A fine girl he would have made," chuckling, Edward Furness replied.

The shadow of a cocked hat, the sound of pacing feet came to them over the stones.

"I'm Plompartay, Plompartay," young Henry said. He spoke importantly, one hand thrust, great-Napoleon fashion, into his blue striped blouse. He was short, he had a wide forehead, a small round stomach, a falling lock of red hair.

"I feel like Barbara Nancy, I feel restless," Margaret remarked.

"Ah, go out, my dear. Do. Go and see Anna. Peace, perfect peace, with dear ones far away," her husband said, looking at her very merrily as he spoke.

Margaret laughed. "What a bachelor you are still!"

Presently she moved out of the house. She shut one door against cats, she opened another for air. To young Henry, pacing in front of his armies, she said absently: "Put your tummy in, Plom."

"You don't understand." Young Henry turned on her, very red and fierce. "I'm Plompartay."

"Well, when you are not Plompartay, please put your tummy in," his mother said. Something inflexible and yet smooth about her, she went on into the house.

"All our children play at soldiers, Edward. Not one of my brothers did. Why?" she asked on a sudden faintly disturbing thought.

"Soldiering is in the air, isn't it?" her husband said. "Plompartay would crumple up if we took his sword away. So would Kaiser Wilhelm and the German General Staff, I imagine. And our own fire-eaters too, for that matter." He returned to the pages of the *Daily Chronicle* which he had been reading at that moment and which were full of these things.

Margaret's thoughts had already flown elsewhere. "I must see Anna. If I think that she is really ill, I shall speak to Seth."

"He will look everywhere but at you. Then he will admire your new hat."

"But I am serious," Margaret said. "If Anna is alone I will bring her back with me."

"Poor Anna," Edward Furness said.

"Why poor?" Margaret asked. "Why do you say so now?" She paused. "You are thinking of Horton Show."

"It was plain enough before," Edward said, half his mind on the newspaper.

"I blame Seth," Margaret said. "Would any other man take his friends out for the day, take his wife out also, and exhibit his preference for his sister-in-law so plainly, and be so sentimental and foolish, and go off with her, to her house, and her husband away? Ellen was, I am sure, only pretending to be ill. Would a woman who was really fainting from the heat straighten her hat immediately on coming round?"

"I can think of one who would," Edward said. "I can think of one who would straighten her hat without waiting to come round."

"No, I wouldn't do that," Margaret said. "And Ellen," she added irrelevantly, "has no taste." She waited, then swept on. "I could have seen Ellen safely home if Anna could not. Indeed almost anyone might have gone with her except the one person who insisted upon going, whom she insisted should go. And what makes the whole affair much worse is that all the neighbourhood should be looking on, the Daffins, the Dummetts, the Odells—everyone, and all of them so delighted," Margaret said. "And for Seth to put Ellen to bed. And say so. Could not Ellen have put herself to bed? What a fool the man is, Edward. What a fool! I must call him so. Anna had no reproaches for him and no words. That is what I cannot understand. And Horton is a very romantic spot for Anna; it is where Seth and she met first when she was a girl. Was ever man so dense as Seth? Oh, besotted, I think." Margaret swung her new hat so hard that the elastic snapped in her hand. "And Anna has said not a word to me, not a word to them," she said, looking down at her hat. "How I would burst out at them in her place! I used to blame Anna when she was melancholy for so long after her child died. I used, almost, to pity Seth. But not now," Margaret said. "Oh, not now. Now everything is plain."

"That Seth is behaving like an ass is pretty plain," Edward remarked. "Nothing else is so plain."

"He is your friend, Edward. You would never judge him," Margaret said.

"It is poor Anna, anyhow, isn't it? We agree there. That is how we began," Edward said.

"You must talk to him. You must," Margaret insisted. Once more she swung her hat. "I was anxious about Anna before. I am even more anxious now."

"Can you talk a man out of being in love with his sister-

in-law?" Edward asked. "Seth has been in love with Ellen for almost as long as he has been married to Anna. But still"—here he almost laughed at his wife—"I'll talk to him some time. We'll see what talking will do." Once more he turned to his *Daily Chronicle.*

One pitied Anna, he thought, his eyes on the page, not because Seth was unfaithful or Ellen treacherous—these things were common enough. One pitied Anna because Seth was her world, Seth was all she had or ever wished to have. Because she was defenceless against unhappiness, because she appeared unable to protect herself. All that we need is a shell, Edward Furness thought.

Margaret's mind, as so often, ran parallel with his. "I could as soon die of temper now as of love," she declared. She gathered her things together. She looked at her husband. "Though I was not always so sensible," almost laughing she said.

Once more Margaret hurried over the fields. For days now I have almost forgotten Anna, she told herself guiltily. Here, on the surface of her mind, where of course it should be, was the present, and the present for her at the moment held scarcely a shadow. For the rest, time melted and vanished, piled up like clouds in the sky. Then, suddenly, time was gone. Of all the days she could remember, only a few, it seemed to her now, stood out from the rest: the day, she told herself, when I came to Alne first, the day in the snow when I met Anna, those days at Thwaites when I brought something of the North unwillingly away with me, when, small though he was, I disliked Tamlin. There was the day soon after Henry was born, when my mother died, when Prue wrote to me: "I am tired; I'll sleep now," my mother had said.

And to-day, Margaret thought again, small Henry plays at being Plompartay with a wooden sword, and I am middle-aged, and Tamlin, almost grown-up, is here. And Edward

and I are part of Alne now, and the Doddingtons' lives and ours run side by side.

Holding her long skirt with one hand she walked faster. The sun, past noon now, filled all the countryside with yellow July light. The swifts swung low over the field, there were dead bumblebees among the fallen lime flowers, under the yellowing lime trees. Colours were bleached and pale, the elm trees were inky green; only the light burned and glowed like a sunset light on the standing corn. Margaret's thoughts, grown fanciful, turned back once more upon herself. I am like a ship in full sail, she thought. There, billowing out before her, was her skirt of frilled pale cotton, here was the wind in her face, the waves of shadow over the stubble field. Now I am what Kate Furness was, she thought again. She remembered Kate and the warmth there was about her, as if the sun were on her always, as if Kate herself were a harvest field. She recalled the sharpness of her own envy, and how Kate had appeared unable to like her, and how she had never tried very much to like Kate. If one is almost all instinct, as I am, one is often all enmity also, she thought. Now that Kate was dead she felt only pity, and with pity a backwash of satisfaction also, such as the living so often feel when they think of the dead.

Kate had died suddenly, only two months ago, laughing in her chair. Fruitful women died like that sometimes, like roses or peonies full-blown. Edward had grieved over Kate, for Kate was what all men wished to find in women. From thinking so she had become jealous of Kate for the last time. Because he suspected the jealousy she felt, Edward had grown angry, perhaps for the last time also. For Edward, so generous himself, could scarcely bear her to be envious, or even, in the way of feminine ill-nature, unkind. Because he could never quickly be reconciled to what he disliked in her, he had gone over the fields for several miles to The Spanish Doubloon, where ivy made a green ceiling for the bar parlour, and old Fader James (as everyone called him)

would sing for them all in a thin quavering voice, beating time on the table with the flat of his hand,

"Napoleon's gone to war, my boys,
Napoleon's gone to war.
He stopped not for the Prooshian,
He stopped not for the Rooshian. . . ."

Edward had noted down words and tune in the small note-book which he carried, in which he entered any country matters that interested him.

After old Fader James had finished his song, the talk, so Edward had told her afterwards, had turned on a great many matters: on the new Liberal Government, for instance, and the great new navy the Germans were building, and the astonishing proposals that were being bruited over here for the reduction of the British fleet by about a quarter. And there had been some criticisms of that on fairly obvious grounds. A bully abroad could not be so very different from a bully at home, everyone agreed. It was no good talking gentle, they all said, to a bully, wherever he was, whatever he might be. Well, let the Government go on the way they were going on, they all declared tolerantly. The Government would soon discover where they were getting to and what people thought, then they'd change their minds. Then England would see something different. Tamlin, who often talked politics with Edward, had been scornful of the new Government's proposals. Danegeld, Tamlin had said. He was very positive, very certain always in what he said.

It was difficult to forget Kate while Tamlin was here. He had been ill with peritonitis; he had been moody and grieving also over Kate. "We'll invite him to Alne," Edward had said. For Edward, who allowed himself only a few pence a week out of a salary of no more than ninety pounds a year, bore no grudge against John, or John's family, or against Tamlin for their enjoyment of old Edwin's

money. Edwin had made only the one promise: he kept that, Edward said, he kept his promise where Barbara Nancy was concerned.

She had spoken irrelevantly. "Tamlin was always an uncomfortable small boy." Where any Yorkshire Furness or any Furness connection was concerned she did not allow herself in these days to say more than this.

From the first there had been something over-careful and polite between Tamlin and herself, something left over, she had thought, from her resentment at old Edwin's will. "When would you like me to leave?" Tamlin had asked only that morning with the disconcerting bluntness she had come to expect from the Furness clan. There had been an odd malicious smile about his mouth as he spoke. He had fine-cut lips, firmly set, a small hooked nose, warm, honey-coloured hair; his eyes were flecked with yellow under the clear grey. He was so tall he stooped a little; like his cousins the Furnesses, he was broad in the shoulders, slim in the hips. She had been confused. "Stay as long as you please," she had answered, looking at him. "I felt you might like me to go at the end of the fortnight," he had said, smiling still. There had been no deference in his manner; there was no deference ever in Tamlin. Almost he condescends to me, she had thought. "No, stay, stay," she had said hastily again. And Tamlin, not thanking her at all, understanding her mind perhaps only too well, had looked bored at once, as if he had caught her out in some insincerity, and gone away.

Margaret leaned her hand on the warm grey wood of the gate leading to the timber yard. I am not altogether nice, her mind went, nor just, nor kind. I am not at all reasonable—perhaps I am like other women, even Furness women, in that. And I shall always remember that I disliked the Yorkshire Furnesses; I shall never be able to care very much for Tamlin.

* * * * *

The Furness's garden was as full of sun as the timber yard was full of shade. The sun was merciless upon Anna's white face, her dark smooth hair, her white collar, her dark gown.

"Tell me about your visitor." Anna leaned forward as she spoke.

"Do you really wish to know?" Margaret spoke lightly. She was conscious at the same time of a sudden leap of fear. The sun is as merciless as the shade now upon Anna, her mind went. She snipped busily at the flowers on the lavender hedge, laying the blue-grey stalks in the rush basket in orderly rows. "My visitor, yes," she said, and paused, then spoke quickly. "Tamlin Richardson Speight. A young man who is clever, and very set on himself, and, of course, not at all polite. He likes women of almost every age from Barbara Nancy upwards, but not, apparently, me. He intends to be a mining engineer. If he intends it, he will be a mining engineer. He is the determined sort." She snipped busily again. "They think coal and ships and steel where Tamlin hails from, cows and pigs here."

"I wish Brock were more the ordinary kind of boy. I wish he were more like your boys," Anna, with one of her apparent irrelevancies, said.

"What do you mean by ordinary?" Margaret straightened and looked at her. "Some very knowledgeable medical men would say my children were 'unstable.' They have such furious tempers."

"Tempers, yes," Anna said.

"But surely, Brock will grow more robust as he grows older, more robust in every way," Margaret said.

"On the surface he will be more robust," Anna answered. She stayed silent then. In the quietness that grew between them Margaret moved further away. Presently she came back. She looked more closely at Anna. There was exhaustion in the droop of Anna's shoulders, in the fall of her hands.

"Anna!" From anxiety she spoke sharply. She stopped

short then. Fearful of showing too much concern, she sat down and began to bunch the lavender stalks together, tying each bunch with a piece of mauve silk. She spoke in practical fashion after a moment. "You are ill. Don't dare to deny it."

"Am I? I never feel sure." Anna smiled, a sudden brief animation, even a faint colour in her face. "This is what I have been asking myself," she said. "Perhaps it comes to the same thing. Can one be unhappy and yet be well and oneself? What in fact are we made of? Earth and air, fire and water? I think there is no earth in me," Anna said, smiling, "no fire in me either."

"What nonsense!" From alarm Margaret spoke even more sharply.

"You think me morbid," Anna said, smiling still. "I will tell you why I have been thinking all this." She looked away from Margaret beyond the garden to the distant line of the wood. "Lately, why I don't quite know, I have grown so tired my mind stops short even at the most trivial effort. What is the use? I ask. What is the use of anything? And I sit still, and think, and do precisely nothing."

"Since Horton Show, of course," Margaret declared in a vexed fashion.

"Not since Horton Show only," Anna said. "For a long time now I have been back in a world by myself. As if I were in a dark wood, or as if I were blind. But all this, I tell myself sometimes, arises because I am ill. Though whether the pain I feel is real, or whether again it is something of the mind I do not know. If I could master my thoughts," Anna said, and moved her hands, then once more held them still. "But they are always there; such sharp thoughts."

Margaret stirred. But at first she did not speak. "Could you not leave the house in the timber yard?" presently she said. "Years ago I urged you to do that. I am always urging it."

"Seth has said that we may. I spoke to him," Anna said. "He was looking relaxed last night and faintly foolish as well when he came in, so that I knew he had seen Ellen. I knew it would be easy then for him to be kind." She spread her hands in her lap and looked at them and spoke absently and as if to herself.

"Oh, I would be so unpleasant to them both," Margaret said and stood up. "Or I would let them go."

"I could never hurt Seth. I have never hurt anyone," Anna said. "And I could never, willingly, let him go."

Together the two women made their way once more into the house. Edward is right: I can do nothing with Anna, nothing, Margaret thought in a depressed fashion. It is as if there were something lacking in me, something lacking in Anna also, as if happiness were a world to itself, as if happy and unhappy people could not meet.

She came with Anna part of the way towards the timber yard, then turned once more towards the village. On an impulse she looked back. On a sudden decision she waited. Now, if I am brave enough, I can speak to Bridget Tufton, she resolved. For Bridget, stepping out as nimbly as ever, was within sight and coming nearer. Margaret waited.

When they were within a few paces of each other Bridget spoke. "You have seen Anna? Don't blame me for the state she is in." She came nearer. "What has she been telling you? Some piece of moonshine? Some rigmarole spun out of her own head?"

"Anna is ill," Margaret said. "Surely you can see that." It gave her a certain amount of satisfaction to be blunt.

Bridget gave no sign of being impressed. "You are one of those women who see everything, who are always certain, aren't you?" she asked unpleasantly.

"I am certain of this," Margaret said. She looked quickly away, then back again. She threw a note of pleading into her voice. "Would you not be unhappy also in Anna's place?"

"I could never be in Anna's place," Bridget said. "I've pushed unhappiness down into the bog of my mind where it'll never rise."

"Anna should live away from the timber yard and from you," Margaret went on, obstinate again and undeterred. "I am convinced of that."

"Anna has never left me. I'll not have her leave me." Bridget spoke almost sullenly now. Her head bent, her cloak wrapped tightly about her, she hurried away.

Almost at once she came posting back. "I never in all my life was a patient woman. I never could stand Anna's moping melancholy ways. All that ails her is her own sick fancy. And who can deal with that? Not God Almighty, nor the angels on high, nor all the powers." In a frenzy of energy she shot both hands to her sides. "How Anna blackens my name. How she miscalls me everywhere." Once more she hurried away.

Somewhat shaken for all her bold front, Margaret came on. When I step into the timber yard, she told herself uneasily and not for the first time, I feel a strangeness that my mind can't altogether reject. Almost, if this were possible, it is as if a small part of evil itself dwelt there. Seth in his own solid fashion may be aware of the same thing. In Ellen's company he may find relief from so much strangeness. For Ellen is raw and earthy, wholesome as any kitchen vegetable after the rain. Perhaps Ellen is fortunate. There are no problems for her; for her the frontiers between the mind and the body are never crossed.

And yet I do not know if I am not interpreting too much, if I am not deceived into thinking all this by the sympathy there is between Anna and myself, by the streak of likeness between us, among so much that is opposite, that makes us friends.

Again, perhaps all this is too simple once more, or too far-fetched. For now—here Margaret stepped from the grass of the field into the road—I am in my other familiar

country, and my mind turns sceptical once more. Why must Anna suffer all this? I ask. Why? Circumstances, a clash of temperament, of will, yes, all the strange scars that unhappiness in childhood leaves. But these, I tell myself, are not enough.

From the village once more she looked back. There, beside the timber yard, was the dark line of the wood, and the jade and straw of the stubble field, and over both the pale milky sky, unruffled, wind-swept.

About the same time that Barbara Nancy set out, Brock Doddington came hurrying over the field. When he hurried, either from eagerness or the nervous tiredness which beset him sometimes, he stumbled. He stumbled now, and the new penknife which he had gone back to fetch fell from his belt on to the grass. He stooped to pick it up. It was a man's knife, with six blades and a corkscrew and a sharp pointed instrument for getting out stones from horses' hooves. Of Brock's many possessions it was his latest and dearest. He loved it obscurely, not because it was new or even because it was fine, but because it stood to him for the sort of person he wished to be: someone like George Fairey, for instance, who could shape anything with a knife; or Albert Odell, who went with the shepherd and carried a crook, and who as often as not in the springtime had a lamb slung like a scarf about his neck. Brock had run to fetch his knife; he ran now to show it off, to share it also, for he was always generous with his possessions, always willing to share.

He lived uncertainly still between a world of his own imagining that was full of terror and delight, and another parallel world, inhabited securely by the Fisherman and the Philosopher, which he shared sometimes but to which he did not altogether belong. Just as his two worlds ran into each other, so truth changed for him, or rather truth and imagination were queerly mixed. At night, in order to

escape from the bright eyes that seemed to fill the darkness of the room or the humped shapes that waited for him in the shadows at the turn of the stair, in order to rid himself also of the vague unhappiness he could not help but feel, but to which he could not put a name, he would conjure from behind his closed lids strange perils and fierce encounters, out of which, after a great deal of effort—often he could not sleep from the excitement and exhaustion of the effort—he would emerge triumphant and undismayed. In all his encounters he was alone, and before that dreadfully afraid. His dream struggles were often so real he prolonged them into his daytime world. He would even speak of them as if they had actually occurred. In order to convince not only his audience, but, more importantly, himself, he would turn boastful. "I killed him straight off," he would say, or, "I knocked him down with one blow," or, "I clove both their skulls," using fancy, coloured-picture-book language for his boasting and speaking in loud conquering tones.

On these more boastful occasions Young Robert and the Fisherman would look pityingly at each other and then at him. Because of the friendship between their two houses, and because children are often tolerant of what they know, they accepted him for what he was—Johnny Brock, and a bit queer.

"You tell such thundering big lies I suppose you think it don't matter, Frog-face," young Robert on the last occasion said. "I mean, nobody could possibly believe 'em, could they?"

Brock had stared at young Robert, all the walls of his cloud palace crashing suddenly about his feet. "Of course I make them up," he said stoutly. "I don't expect you to believe them."

"We don't." As if in mockery, young Robert had grinned at him and turned a slow somersault upon the grass.

Brock saw him again, the grey knickerbockered legs going

over, the round mouse-coloured head and laughing greenish eyes coming up.

"It's no use. I can't turn somersaults," he said. He had walked away then. In the next moment, I can't do anything very much, he had told himself smartingly.

He remembered all this, the knife horny and rough in his hand. It was the sort of knife the Fisherman would use expertly to gut his fish. I'll lend it to him, Brock resolved. Warmed by his own generosity he ran on.

There, not very far away, was Barbara Nancy, walking sedately over the field and looking back at him over her shoulder repeatedly. Brock whooped, waved the penknife and ran faster. Barbara Nancy waited. The wind streamed her hair and the long ends of her sash. With a small, determined gesture she planted herself firmly against the wind, she pushed her hair behind her ears.

"I think you've got a lovely little red face," Brock, catching up with her, said. Panting, and even a little embarrassed at his own exuberance, he dropped into a walk.

"Do you know, Barbara Nan," he said all in a moment, "there are lions in Tippett's Wood?"

A flicker of incredulity wiped out the momentary astonishment on Barbara Nancy's face.

"How many?" she inquired.

Brock did not hesitate. "Two old ones and a young one. The young one, the male cub, that is"—here Brock corrected himself rapidly—"has a very dark mane." Not looking at Barbara Nancy, he held his breath.

But Barbara Nancy had set off on flowery paths of her own. Walking beside him pensively on her toes and weaving in and out of the clumps of green sorrel, she said: "When I cut off Lady Jane Grey's head all the blood ran over the stones. And a little brown dog with blue eyes came into the woodshed and lapped up the blood." She halted. She, too, corrected herself. "No, that was when I cut off Queen Mary of Scots' head." She eyed Brock solemnly. He

opened his mouth, he swallowed, he shut it again. Disappointment and disbelief, as plainly as if he had spoken, were written on his face.

Barbara Nancy turned. She laid her hand on her diaphragm. Something was hollow there and the hollow burned. Yours was all pretend too, she thought instantly and wished to say. She walked beside Brock. She said nothing. Because of this habit of hers of not saying anything even when she might excusably say a great deal, people thought her gentle and good and silly when she was not gentle, nor good, nor silly. Because of this habit of hers, other children, and even grown-ups, presumed. Stepping forward too far, they invaded the territory that was her own. Trespass of this kind led to furious, even if unspoken, resentment on her part, then, finally, to forgetfulness. For Barbara Nancy seldom remembered long enough to need to forgive. With a warmth and quickness of which she could never cure herself, she simply forgot.

Almost she forgot now, she forgave Brock Doddington. Almost, but not quite. Walking more quickly and flinging her words over her shoulder, she inquired: "And did the lions roar?"

"Oh, tremendous." Brock opened large eyes. "They roared so loud I felt them here." He tapped his chest. "It was just as if I roared," modestly dropping his eyes, he said.

"Why didn't they eat you?" Barbara Nancy broke into a trot. "They did ought to have," over her shoulder she said.

The Philosopher, the Fisherman and Tamlin were like three different sizes of dark clothes-pegs walking a longish distance ahead. "I want them. I want to catch them up," Barbara Nancy said. She ran faster, then looked back. Brock, his knees coming up squarely, ran in a laboured fashion, his chin drawn fiercely in, his knife bumping on his belt. He was something different already, Barbara Nancy felt almost pityingly: he was King Henry the Eighth going

off to marry Lady Jane Seymour, or Richard the Lion Heart charging the Saladin. At once, as if she had seen something private, she turned her head. A bumblebee flew past, making as it did so a tiny fan of wings against her cheek, and besides that a pleasant bumbling sound. There were other bumblebees: striped ones, black velvety ones, small faded fox-coloured ones, clinging with sticky pollen-covered legs to the white clovers, weighing down the yellow and green tasselled bunches of the lime flowers. There were bees and butterflies on the wide-open pink-mauve blackberry blossoms. Barbara Nancy paused for a second to look at them, then ran on. Like cows in a picture, the cows lay under the shadow of the ash tree. Their jaws moved steadily, they stared at her out of liquid melting eyes; as though in astonishment their tails ceased to pat the ground as she passed. The swallows flew low over the field, one wing-tip touching and bending the tops of the grasses; a willow wren ~~sang, a small~~ feather-warm wind blew.

Barbara Nancy forgot pride or hurt. Her territory was whole once more, was hers again. Instead of saying anything which, however true, however good for Brock Doddington to hear, might yet be rude, Barbara Nancy sang. When you ran, and the wind blew in your hair, words sang themselves into your mind.

"This is the Well Meadow I am in,"

Barbara Nancy sang,

"Here are butterflies and flowers,
And cows and bumblebees."

"Stop," Brock cried, panting after her.

Shaking her head, she ran on. And Brock, since in the end he always did what Barbara Nancy did, ran too.

The green leaves were very beautiful on the green water.

The yellow cups of the water-lilies floated between them, or, unopened yet, stood up stiffly like drumsticks, or leaned sideways like dancers. The wind made a broad way on the river, the wind itself was a river of shining fishes' scales. The trees, standing close together, leaned over, then for a hundred yards the river ran clear from curve to curve between wide grassy shores. This was the Basin Hole, where the green-black water was piled as it were fathoms deep. No lilies grew here, but not far from the curving banks were "whirlyholes," whirlpools of fast-moving water like catherine wheels, like spinning snail-shells. Once in the "whirlyhole" you were caught and sucked under, you could never by your own strength get out. The little sticks that sailed safely for miles were caught and whirled in. They would spin round for a day; then they'd melt—wood did melt—and in the morning they would no longer be there. Spirits, like thin old women with sharp grey eyes, lived in the whirlpools and shot up invisible arms and caught at you. You went under, and the water or the old women laughed, and, making the same laughing sound as though it spoke, the water folded in and closed over you.

"I'm cold. I don't like it," Brock said. Clad in his bathing-drawers he shivered on the bank. "Custard!" said the others, who had been splashing about in the water for some moments. Nothing they said was ill-meant. Curiously Brock minded very little what they said. It's too deep. They've filled it too full, he thought childishly. He hated to think of all the shining depths of water under him as he swam; the thought, and the feeling that came with the thought, made him afraid. "I hate the Basin Hole," he said. "Custard!" they called out to him again.

Tamlin twitched up his bathing-drawers and laughed, looking at him. He was a little like a lion, Brock thought. The Fisherman jumped up and down in the shallower water, slapping his chest. It was thin and white: you could see his heart pounding away steadily under his ribs. "Cus-

tard!" the Fisherman said amiably again, and then, "Poor old Johnny Brock!" Young Robert, squatting upon the bank, a pile of cut reeds beside him, was busily sharpening his knife upon a blakey-patent on the sole of one of his boots. Tamlin was laughing at them all but not at him, Brock felt. Tamlin excluded him.

I hate the Basin Hole. I don't like Tamlin. Not answering them, Brock poked with his bare toes at the roots of short grass on the bank. To his surprise one root came clean away. His face lightened then. His mood, that was black and tender like a bruise, changed. "Look." Proudly he held up a foot.

Young Robert, who was nearest, scarcely glanced at him. He called out instead, "Johnny Dodd is a monkey, a frog-monkey. Then he ought to be able to swim as well as tear up grass roots with his toes." Whistling to himself surprisingly loud and clear, he began to divide the heap of reeds at his feet into two bundles. Having divided them, Brock watching all the while, he tied each bundle with a stout withy thong. "Why don't you get some reeds too, Frog-face?" he asked, bending his head and frowning and fitting a bundle of reeds under each arm. "I don't like the Basin Hole either." He looked up. "Honest, it makes me pretty sick. Come to that, I don't like swimming at all. Not much. It puts green gooseflesh over me."

Brock stared at him.

"You can walk along the river just as well as you can swim up it," young Robert said, his head cocked to one side.

Brock still stared. "But you're going in all the same!"

"Just for the pleasure of coming out again, Frog-face," the Philosopher said, and, his bundles of reeds firmly in place by this time, he stepped gingerly down the bank.

That was just the surprising sort of thing young Robert would say, Brock reflected crossly. That was just the simple sort of way also in which he, Brock, would be caught out.

"Now for it," the Fisherman cried suddenly and waved

his arms. He was in the water once more, ducking and coming up again and shaking his head like a dog. More circumspectly young Robert slid in. Tamlin dived after. "Come on," they all cried.

"No," Brock said, "no," obstinately.

"Stay out then." They became cheerful and indifferent. They lay on their backs in the water between the purple loosestrife and the flowering reeds under the long channel of sky, as if they had forgotten him. He wandered off, then returned. "Custard!" they had called him. He did not mind so much what they said, he minded what he felt, he minded most of all what showed.

Looking concentrated and a shade dour, and keeping a kind of distance, Barbara Nancy joined him on the bank. Why do I have to be a girl and just one girl? she was thinking. For it always seemed to her by an odd kind of arithmetic that though one girl might be no good at all, two girls could be very good indeed, two girls might even have as much fun as two boys.

"I say, the whirlyholes," Brock said, a tremor of excitement in his voice. If he could talk about them he would not mind them so much, he felt. "Those whirlpools," he said again.

"Why don't you never finish what you say?" Because she felt out of humour Barbara Nancy threw a certain impatience into her look.

For a moment in a startled fashion Brock saw her very clearly: the purple masses of loosestrife behind her, the blue flowers like stars on her frock, the sun as it were shining out of her eyes. They're the colour of all those little blue flowers, Brock thought.

"Your hair's shiny. Your hair is full of little shining gold wires," he said confusedly.

"Oh." Barbara Nancy moved impatiently away.

Those whirlpools, Brock thought again. Simply by looking at them he was back in his secret world where the old

grey women lived and the water laughed and even the shadows came alive. The whirlpools went round and round, continually. They were wheel-pools even if there were no spokes in them. The river moved swiftly; even down to the last green depths the water moved and shone. The current carried him with it; it carried his thoughts along too. Beyond the boundary of the river on the far side, the grass moved in the meadow, the trees moved in the sun; the Basin Hole was full of dim shouts and cool splashings and noise.

"You're awful thin." Barbara Nancy came back and looked at him distastefully. "Your bones show."

"I know," Brock said. He did not look at her. It's all moving; I'm moving against my will—there was an odd fascination for him in the thought. Even now, though the feeling of movement was there in his brain, he knew that he stood still.

"I'm best by myself," Barbara Nancy declared crisply. Brock did not speak. "You are copying them, Brock Doddington," she declared. She lowered her chin; she looked at him accusingly under drawn brows. They were no more than a faint pencil line of down, silvery and fair, upon her face.

If I keep moving I shall be in, Brock thought again.

Staring hard and resentfully over her shoulder, Barbara Nancy went away.

The river was quiet now; the swimmers had moved farther downstream; the tits and the warblers, fluttering in stages from tree to tree, had gone. Caught in the current, a frog came swimming down the river. Its green and yellow legs laboured manfully, its black eyes showed like tiny dark gig lamps, its green head was thrust just above the lap of the water. Nearer it came, and nearer still, to the spinning water-wheels, the spinning snail-shells. Now the brown bubbles of water broke across its track; now the frog itself was swept forward, churned round, then caught and held

as if between the spokes of a wheel. Faster and faster it whirled, and more despairingly. The sun shone on the yellow lilies, the flat green leaves, on the pinkish clay of the bank set thick with flowers, on the dark water, on the frog's dark eyes. Irresistibly the river moved, the petals of the wild roses floated as though untouched on the smooth sweep of water between the two whirlpools.

"That poor damned frog," Brock said. He scarcely knew that he swore. A queer excitement mounted in him. For all that, his thoughts beat steadily, regular as pulse beats, in his brain. If he went into the water, near the whirlpools; if, like God, he stretched out an arm and snatched up the frog, and held it, and brought it safely to shore, then the mingled scorn and pity Tamlin and the rest felt for him would no longer be pity or scorn. And his own fear, which was something frail and shrinking in him, would by the same process almost be cast out.

Like someone mesmerized he stepped in. As the water washed his feet and came up smoothly to meet him, I'm moving, I'm in, he thought; then, as the deep water closed over him, I'm not afraid. He lost breath for a second, then splashed hard, and swam. From the shock of it all quite suddenly again he possessed himself. Heading straight for the whirlpool—I'll swim back to them, I'll show them, he resolved. The frog was spinning despairingly only a few inches away without even a frog's will or a frog's purpose now. The frog has become part of the whirlpool, Brock thought. It was an odd thought and one that surprised even himself. Like God he stretched out an arm, like Brock Doddington merely he put out all his strength; in the next moment the current caught at him; he was held; he, too, was swept in. It is stronger than I am, it goes deeper, his mind went. Not only the whirlpool but fear once more caught him. There were lead weights on his legs, cold hands on his feet, pulling at him. It was then that he cried out.

From what appeared to be a long distance at last he heard the Fisherman, or it might have been the Philosopher, say: "Poor old Frog-face, cheer up, Frog-face." And Tamlin's voice, cautious and as though relieved, "He'll do now."

"Where is it?" Brock called from the place to which he had gone. He opened his eyes. Barbara Nancy, white-faced, stared down at him. "Where is it?" he asked, "that frog?"

"Which frog?" Their voices beat at him. "Here you are. You're all right, frog," Tamlin said.

"That frog, if it was a frog, is at the bottom of the whirly-hole by this time. Phut-t." Young Robert described a spiral with one finger and pointed down. "Gone," he said.

Brock cast an arm tremblingly over his eyes. "The light hurts. I didn't save him. I wanted to," he said.

"Come on. Brace up." Tamlin bent over him and tapped him gently.

"Don't touch me. I can't stand it. I can't." Brock heard his own voice strained and shrill. Instantly he felt what they felt, the estrangement, the surprise. He turned then. "Do stop staring at me, all of you. Do, do." he said, quickness and vehemence mixed in his voice. "There was the frog, I tell you, drowning. I ask you, how could I help going in?" He felt sick suddenly, small watery globes beginning to dance and move in patterns before his eyes.

"Ah, go to bed." Tamlin's eyes narrowed. His face changed. He stood up. "Take castor oil," he said, not loud, but harsh enough to be heard.

"I won't, I won't." Brock turned wild and helpless once more.

"Oh, I say, Frog." The Fisherman's blue eyes darkened in astonishment and concern. "He's queer still, that's it," he said. He addressed them all.

"Bring my shoes, Barbara Nan." Tamlin called to her over all their heads.

Infected by the general discord, Barbara Nancy shook her head. "No."

"What's it like in the whirlpool?" young Robert was inquiring of Brock. "I like to find out about things. I'd just like to know."

"Why not drown yourself and see?" Tamlin grinned easily at the Philosopher.

"There would have been a fuss if you'd drowned," young Robert, still addressing Johnny Brock, said. "There'd have been policemen and an inquest and a funeral and a school holiday and I don't know what-all."

"Stop, stop talking about me. I'm not drowning." Brock sat up and shivered again.

"You're all gooseflesh. You look like a blue plum," walking round him in an interested fashion, young Robert declared once more.

"Oh, shut up, don't be a darned mosquito. Leave him be," the Fisherman said.

Brock reached shakily for his clothes.

"Don't forget your cap," Tamlin said. He had his shoes on by this time. His socks were blue with red stripes running round them.

Barbara Nancy, admiring, and yet reluctant to admire, stood a little way off and observed them narrowly.

"You've never said a single thank you to Tamlin, Johnny Brock, I think you might," the Fisherman said, walking beside Brock a little way before saying goodbye and stopping then.

"Because I don't feel like it," Brock said sulkily. He made off then.

Tamlin addressed Barbara Nancy. "We'll let him drown another time, shall we?"

While boring a hole in the field with one toe, Barbara Nancy shook her head. It was quite true. Tamlin had jumped at once into the water. He had leaned over and seized Brock by the hair; lying flat on his back in the water,

he had, as it were, rowed Brock Doddington in. It was only right, she had to admit, that Brock should return thanks to Tamlin.

Almost before she was aware of it they were talking about her. "Tamlin, do you know what she said once?" the Fisherman said. "She said that bridges were meant for rivers to go under."

"So they are," Barbara Nancy cried. "So they are."

They all laughed loudly then, or so it seemed to Barbara Nancy's shocked ears.

"I don't like any of you," she declared, and trembled with rage. "I don't like Tamlin." Yes, that was true.

"What shall we do to her?" Tamlin caught her by the waist. "Hold her up by her toes? Like a guinea-pig?" he said, laughing.

But the others turned serious. "No," the Fisherman said. "No."

"Why not?" Tamlin asked, fending off silent and furious attacks from Barbara Nancy herself.

"Because you wouldn't. Because it isn't the thing," the Fisherman said, looking and feeling very hot.

"You're nothing but a pack of kids. As if I meant it, as if I were serious," Tamlin said, and he dropped Barbara Nancy without ceremony upon the grass. He dusted his knees, he straightened his tie; then, like someone deeply offended, went off by himself.

They were all silent and breathing hard, looking after him. Even his long shadow seemed to them to stalk angrily away.

"I didn't want to be held up. I didn't want my drawers to show," Barbara Nancy declared virtuously.

But the two boys were looking at each other; they were not listening to her.

"Well," the Fisherman said flatly, "well," his eyes following Tamlin.

Their cousin was always like that, they thought. He

was always impatient, getting bored with them, going off suddenly. Slowly, one by one, they gathered their scattered possessions together and came away. And their sister, tagging on behind, came along too.

CHAPTER TWO

ABSENCE

BARBARA NANCY paused. The last withered blossom had been snipped from the rose tree. The sun was up, the day stretched before her, not so empty, it was true, as it had appeared when her mother had driven away, but still empty enough. Irresolute, she waited for a moment among the ranks of flowers, among the mauve scabious, the red snapdragons, the white and mauve rocket. Her father came up the path and touched a hand to her face. His hand was dry and warm; it always smelled of chalk.

"What a house," he said, "what a house! What a family, Barbara Nan!" He looked at her. "I'll give you all the house-keeping money," he said again, "and you shall spend it and give me the change. The change, if any," her father said. She thought for a moment, her hand in his pocket now where the pen-knife was and the odd pieces of chalk, misgiving and pride catching at her in turn. "So I'm off until tea-time," her father said. Then, with a wave of his stick, he went away.

He couldn't bear it either, he meant. Barbara Nancy looked about her. The Fisherman was nowhere to be seen. He was in the littlest house, she remembered. It had a green dome to it and a round knob on the top of the dome. Their father and the boys always referred to it as St. Paul's. The Fisherman had been there a long time: no doubt he had locked himself in. That meant he had been crying and was

waiting until his face no longer looked as if he had cried. And the Philosopher sat under the Victoria plum tree on a bench, his back to her, eating red plums. Even as she looked at him—"I've got the belly-ache," the Philosopher said, reeling out from under the plum tree.

"You ought to take a powder," Barbara Nancy advised mechanically, gazing at him out of red, tear-dimmed eyes.

"I'd rather go rabbiting," the Philosopher said.

In the same moment the Fisherman, whistling elaborately, came strolling down the path. Still whistling he reached under the woodshed eaves for his fishing-rod. Going fishing, Barbara Nancy thought, and without me, pity for herself and indignation mixed welling up in her mind.

Mrs. Fairey came towards them at that moment. She had her cloak on and her bonnet with the jet dangles. "Come and carry my basket, wouldn't you like to, there's a good girl," she said.

Barbara Nancy came along with her and Plompartay, as if he were not quite sure of what he wished to do, came also. All this time he had been sitting quietly in the woodshed, which he had turned into his private cave, eating pink rock. He had pink rock all over his cheeks and was trying economically to lick all the pink off with his tongue. "Leave it, it doesn't show, much," Barbara Nancy said.

The three of them set off, Plompartay, since he was afraid one of them would hold his hand, dragging behind. He had a tin can at the end of a piece of string which bumped along behind him, and every now and then jibbed furiously. "It's a horse," Barbara Nancy explained just in case Mrs. Fairey did not know.

"You can perhaps find Mrs. Doddington's boy and amuse yourselves," Mrs. Fairey said kindly, walking very quickly beside Barbara Nancy across the field, all the jet dangles in her bonnet swinging and clashing together. "George bought me a new bonnet, this is my second-best bonnet," Mrs. Fairey said.

"One of George's horses wears a bonnet in the very extremely hot days," Barbara Nancy said. Then, because quite half of her mind was far away, although she was interested and anxious to be polite: "Why did my mother have to go to my Aunt Sarah's without me?" she inquired.

"There, now," Mrs. Fairey began, beginning to offer comfort, as Barbara Nancy knew.

She interrupted her. "Oh, I don't mind that." Later, with a sigh, "I shall have a great deal to do," she said.

"That's right," Mrs. Fairey declared in loud relieved tones, "that's right."

They halted. Here was the gate, and the trees leaning over and nearly meeting across the gate. Barbara Nancy held it open for Mrs. Fairey to pass through. At the same moment Plompartay ducked a copper-coloured head, and, looking very fat in his blue-and-white striped sailor's blouse, began to run all the way home, his tin can bumping and curvetting in a spirited fashion behind him.

Barbara Nancy looked back. "Plom always runs away just here."

"Bridget Tufton's only got the four cats now," Mrs. Fairey said and looked surprised, staring after Plom.

"Plom doesn't notice cats. Plom doesn't like it here, that's all," Barbara Nancy said.

The two children—it was Brock's suggestion—played on the flat top of the bank by the Tuftons' cottage where the light fell piercingly through the beech leaves. Outside and all round the wood the air seemed blue. As if the sky had fallen a bit, Barbara Nancy thought, or as if the trees were rooted in the sky.

"It's a silly sort of game, really," Brock said, and he leaned on one arm. "Because you never know what to do with 'em when you have caught 'em. And you don't catch 'em." Frowning, he held the looped end of the string

attached to the supporting stick gingerly in one hand. At the least jerk the sieve would fall neatly down on crumbs and birds. But the birds were wary. They dipped about in the trees, they made small flights overhead; one or two coal-tits perched above the children's heads sang their small song, that always sounded like a little silver watch being wound and wound; one or two sparrows, no more, hopped around the sieve in what appeared to be a purely exploratory fashion. As yet not a bird had ventured inside.

"And then," Brock said, "when a bird looks like hopping in, you get nervous—at least I do—and the string waggles and the bird flies away."

"You ought to lie flat down, then it wouldn't waggle," Barbara Nancy said.

"It's always spuggitts you catch, too, and there are millions of spuggitts," Brock said gloomily again.

Barbara Nancy sighed. I hate complaining, I like it peaceful, she thought. "I like it blue and green," she said. She looked over Mrs. Tufton's garden to the timber yard and the river. Beyond the river were the fields coloured every kind of green, and beyond them the blue misty line of hills, and beyond still, dark blue with a light like snow on them, the mountains of Wales. "The Aber-gav-enny Mountains," she said, pronouncing carefully, but inaccurately. She hugged her knees; she spread her white pinafore over them and hugged them again. I'd like to go there, she thought. On another and almost parallel thought she said: "I ate roasted spuggitt, roasted sparrow. They didn't take the insides out. I was sick."

Brock turned his head. "It makes you feel full of worms, doesn't it?"

He was always sympathetic, Barbara Nancy remembered. She laid a hand on one of his knees. "You've got queer knees, bulgy." You don't go lion-hunting now, you're too big; she thought. "And you can swim too," she said.

"Sshh!" Brock silenced her. In that second several

things began to happen all at once. A sparrow, as lightly as if it were going to a dance, hopped under the sieve. And Brock's mother came running out of the house and through the garden towards the wood, and Mrs. Tufton at once came running after her. "So you're leaving me," Mrs. Tufton said, taking hold of Mrs. Doddington's arm and shaking it, "much good may it do you!" Dropping Mrs. Doddington's arm, she stood back a little way. "You'll not leave me for long." "For ever, I've told you," they heard Mrs. Doddington say. Though she spoke in not much more than a whisper, their nerves were so tight-stretched they could not help but hear. "How can you bear to quarrel before the children?" Mrs. Doddington asked, and now her voice, though it was louder, sounded as if she would cry. "Stop this fuss, come in," Mrs. Tufton said again and caught at her daughter's arm. "Running about like a madwoman," they heard her say. "Will you never let me be, never?" Mrs. Doddington cried out then. And suddenly she was free and running fast into the house. "Even in my grave you'll follow me," they heard her say over her shoulder just before the door opened and the house—it seemed like that to them—once more took her in.

"I hate old Tufton, I hate her, I wish her dead," Brock said.

"What is it?" Barbara Nancy was bewildered and alarmed.

"I crept downstairs. I heard," Brock said, very white. "I wish all her cats were tigers, I wish they would eat her up and the river wash away her bones."

It occurred to Barbara Nancy that she might laugh. But she did not wish to laugh. From a faint feeling of shock, or at least surprise, her mind once more took note of a number of things: of the quietness there was suddenly about them as if it were quiet in the house too, and the tortoiseshell cat under the chrysanthemum cuttings washing its face in the sun, and the way Brock's toes in his sandals were curled

stiffly in, and the ladybird, yellow with black spots on it, that was lurching up one side of his head.

Brock looked at her, excitement and trembling on his face. "My mother said to her, said to Biddy Tufton: 'There's so much evil here it will never die.' What did she mean? I've thought and thought."

Barbara Nancy was silent for a moment. She spoke stolidly. "My father says everything dies and comes up again. Birds and animals and people, he says, are a bit different from things but not so much. There's always birds and animals and people, he says. I don't know quite, I don't know about evil," she said. "I expect it comes up again."

"My grandmother will walk on all our graves, my mother says."

"Well, I don't see that it'll matter," Barbara Nancy was about to declare in relief. Instead, "Oh, pull the string, quick, pull," on a sudden she said, for three birds were making small brittle adventurous pecks just inside the sieve.

"I told you it was a silly game," Brock cried out in the next second. "I told you it was." He had pulled too jerkily, the stick had broken, the birds had flown off. Furious, and filled with a kind of despair that had very little, Barbara Nancy felt, to do with the birds, he rushed at the sieve and, picking it up in both arms, hurled it down the bank. It rolled a short distance, then settled slowly on its side. "That's where it belongs, that is where it can stay," he said, looking after the sieve more contentedly.

"Well." Barbara Nancy got to her feet. In disturbed moments she had the Fisherman's habit of saying "Well." I don't want to be here either, she thought, not any more than Plompartay did. She shook her skirts. "I think I'll go now." As if she were at a tea-party and it was half-past five o'clock, she spoke formally. She turned. I'll run like Plompartay. No, she decided again, I'll walk, quiet but fast, like I do in the dark.

"Come back. Come back, I tell you," Brock shouted after her. When she made no answer he turned disagreeable and rude. "Go away then. Who wants you? Not me." His legs apart, his face working and scowling, he watched her go.

Three weeks of absence had almost passed. In two days Margaret was due to return; that morning the children's father, stepping out more briskly than usual, for he was by habit a leisurely and meditative walker, had bade them farewell and gone off to the station. In spite of all that he had said half-jokingly to Barbara Nancy a few days ago, he was to stay at the Manifolds's house in North Wales. It was from there that he would bring their mother home. "Why didn't you go with her?" his daughter had asked. "Manifolds are a bit grand for Furnesses," her father had said. She had slipped from between his knees and had sat upon a chair. "Nobody's better than you and me are," she had said.

The day, so swollen with importance for all the Furnesses, was marred, as such days often are, by a family misunderstanding of the sort that can never quite be put right. It had all to do with the last of the mutton pie and the bone that formed the greater portion of what was left for Plompartay. At sight of the bone he had been filled with a peculiar and understandable indignation. Breathing fire and menaces, he had gone off to the Gorralls. They would feed him, he had declared, running off, his red money-box under his arm, all the pennies clashing hideously together as he ran. The others, though pooh-poohing Plom and his rages—Plom was often in a rage—had nevertheless found their day increasingly overcast. Even the Philosopher, whose pooh-poohs had been the loudest, was constrained to go off with his friend Jim, the waggoner. Seated beside Jim on the high seat of the covered four-horse mill-waggon, and joining in all the waggoner's choruses, it was possible to

forget Plompartay, it was possible indeed to forget that there were any grievances or indignations in the world.

The Fisherman had walked up the garden path and back again; he had damped and afterwards brushed his hair and drunk a great deal of rhubarb sherbet. "You and I could go fishing," he had announced at last to Barbara Nancy.

"I wish it hadn't been such a big bone," Barbara Nancy had replied and she had sighed guiltily.

They went fishing, and a partial peace at least descended upon them. The water shone greenish-dark, you could see your face in it as though dusked over and pale, and your hair standing out round your face, and the water-weeds swaying as though to the sound of the ripples the water made, and dull brown fish looking as though they were made of soft baked mud slipping through the water, and the red-bellied sticklebacks darting in and out of the shallows, like gunboats on the Yang-tse, the Fisherman said, and the white flowers of the duckweed, like white stars, Barbara Nancy thought, in the floating green of a mermaid's hair.

While they fished they were happy and mostly silent. Silence was part of the day, the air was wrapped close like a leaf about them, the sky came down low like an umbrella over their heads. Just as the sun was setting they turned for home. There would be a storm, the Fisherman said, and he slipped its waterproof cover lovingly over his new fishing-rod. As they made for home the skies grew even more closely packed. Now a wide band of fire could be seen between two thick belts of cloud, not a leaf stirred, a few drops of rain fell. In order to hurry against the storm that must come, they chose the shorter way to the village which led over a small plank bridge to the timber yard. They were in sight of the Tuftons' house once more when the first clap of thunder came. A yellow light stronger than any they remembered burned coldly before them in the sky. Everything appeared solid and heavy and motionless in the strange

light, even the air seemed imprisoned between the fields and the sky. Only the thunder moved, like a giant, Barbara Nancy thought, striding the rain clouds. But when lightning came it was like a trickle of flame on the clouds, or a forked tree. It was like Chinese writing, the Fisherman said, standing still and watching the lightning run and score the blank page of the sky.

As they stood still a sheet of crocus-blue flame flashed before their eyes; in the same instant they were aware of the figure of Bridget Tufton, sharply illumined in the flame, standing on the other side of the plank bridge, by the water's edge. Even as they caught sight of her, her arms shot up, her hands covered her face. The flame was all around them then, lapping them in its blue light. In the next breath it died. Now, in a kind of blindness, they were aware of lightning, no more than a small scorpion of fire, curling harmlessly into the ground at their feet.

The Fisherman's rod fell flatly from his hand. "My arms have gone dead," he said, his eyes quiet and dark. I feel full of the flame, his sister thought. She swallowed; she did not speak. The Fisherman swung his arms. "They're coming alive. They've come," he said.

The fishing-rod in Barbara Nancy's hand, they came on. As they did so Bridget Tufton ran before them from the other side, her head down, her thin legs awkward and striding like those of some long-legged ungainly bird.

"She expected the lightning to strike us," the Fisherman said. His cheeks that were always brown and red burned angrily.

As if it were her lightning, Barbara Nancy thought. "But Mrs. Tufton couldn't," she said. Grown doubtful suddenly, once more she stood still.

The Fisherman paused at the same moment. He stretched out an arm, he pointed. "The house is struck, it's on fire." He began instantly to run.

Barbara Nancy ran after him. A small banner of flame

was flapping like a duster out of Mrs. Tufton's top window, and there were small thin tongues of smoke curling out as though joyfully from under the roof.

"I'm not helping her," the Fisherman threw over his shoulder as he ran. "Let the house burn." He spoke resentfully still.

As they ran other people also came running to meet them out of the small houses. Like black beetles they went scurrying over the field; as they passed the children they called to each other breathlessly: the Tuftons' house was on fire, all the timber yard was on fire. They were almost home when the fire engine dashed by at a gallop, the firemen still buttoning their coats. The sun shone on the blue surface of the road, on the wet coats of the four brown horses, on the firemen's axes and brass helmets.

"Now Mrs. Tufton will have to go and live with Mrs. Doddington," Barbara Nancy declared.

In the next moment she forgot Mrs. Tufton, she forgot everything. "There's Plom," she cried. There, on the other side of the road, wary and indignant still, his eyes under the wet flapping brim of his grey felt hat as blue as any sea, was Plompartay. Barbara Nancy ducked and dived across the road. Not daring to take hold of his hand, "Here's Plom. Here he is," she announced happily.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CLOCK

THE summer weather held. Margaret returned from her holiday full of new zest; Mrs. Tufton, walking briskly, her cats stepping delicately behind her, removed herself, as Barbara Nancy had foretold, to the Doddingtons' new house. Since Anna was scarcely ever to be seen,

rumours like long-tailed magpies flew about the village: Mrs. Doddington and her mother were not on speaking terms, Mrs. Doddington was ill of something unknown, Mrs. Doddington had not long to live. Seth, it was observed, wore a troubled look. He was getting thin, the gossips declared, noting with sharp, pitiless eyes how his fawn waistcoat and his breeches of Bedford cord fell away. By contrast Mrs. Tufton was observed to be bright and alert. Her cats—no more than four in number now—posed themselves about the garden or the house like Egyptian statues, or stalked about the wood, while the smaller birds sang and twittered down at them from the tops of the tallest trees.

"I can do nothing with Anna, nothing," Seth complained despairingly to Edward Furness. "She's not free, she says. I don't know what she means, not 'free.'" Seth's normally smooth voice was uneven, his cleric's mouth trembled as he spoke.

"Pack Mrs. Tufton off," Edward Furness advised. "And her cats with her."

Mrs. Tufton stayed on. "Where could I go, pray?" she inquired. And—the Furnesses considered this to be a final piece of impudence—"Who," she asked, "will look after Seth while Anna is ill?" Her manner silenced her son-in-law, who was in any case easily silenced. "Next week," he continually promised Anna, "next month."

The long days stretched on as though without end, and the school holidays with them. The air was full of petals and scents and sun; never for the Furnesses was there a more enchanted time. After Margaret's return the house appeared to overflow with contentment. The Fisherman whistled like a blackbird; Plompartay, out of a pure feeling of happiness, took to hammering everything within reach; even the Philosopher, with that small sideways smile of his, appeared openly to rejoice.

Like everything else, whether real or imaginary, their

contentment changed. Suddenly, or so it seemed to them, the rain, like a long scarf endlessly unfurled, came down on the warm leaves, the wide-open flowers; everywhere in its wake it left a rack of petals, of blown plants, of beaten corn. The change in the weather filled the Furnesses with a faint but stoic gloom. Now the end of the holidays, which had seemed to them far-off, on the other side of summer, appeared, like to-morrow, within sight.

Not only the weather hinted at change. Some subtler deterioration was at work. There were whispered conversations among their elders uncomfortably broken off at the approach of any younger member of the family; there were unexplained comings and goings between their house and the Doddingtons' house; more important than either of these things for them was the increasing air of preoccupation on their mother's face.

It was Barbara Nancy who, without intending to do so, finally uncovered the mystery. The day, after being wet, had turned fine again; a thin watery sun shone in a dark sky. The Doddingtons' house, which stood a little way out of the village and faced, on the opposite side of the road, a small wood, was lit up as though it were already dark. A cab, looking very glossy and small in the light, was waiting outside. As Barbara Nancy paused to look a second time, Mr. Doddington came out of the gate, bearing Mrs. Doddington wrapped up in a white shawl like a child in his arms. Barbara Nancy half waved a hand. But Mrs. Doddington looked back, her eyes expressionless and dark, the wide bands of her hair smooth and black as though painted under the folds of her shawl. Then the cab, Mr. and Mrs. Doddington inside, drove off.

"Why did you stand so and stare?" Barbara Nancy's mother, coming suddenly out of the house, asked, briskly taking her daughter off towards home once more. Mrs. Doddington was ill, she explained, Mrs. Doddington was going to hospital and wished no one to know.

"I didn't stare. I didn't mean to stare," Barbara Nancy wished to say. She could not speak. Like the shadow of a bird's wing sorrow touched her for a moment. Then, like a bird again, once more sorrow dipped away.

Mrs. Fairey and Margaret were talking together a fortnight later.

"If I sew," Margaret said, "Mrs. Doddington is not tempted to talk so much." She dropped a pair of scissors, a thimble and a reel of cotton into her basket.

"Who else has she got to talk to but you, the poor soul?" Mrs. Fairey asked. She stood before the window of the Furness's small kitchen and jabbed with an expert finger at the roots of the geraniums in their earthenware pots. "These plants are dry. They do look a pair of faded, poor, worn-out things," she said. She turned impatient suddenly. "You've got to talk to somebody if it's only yourself," she declared.

"When Mrs. Doddington talks it is as though she were talking to herself," Margaret said.

"I've heard her," Mrs. Fairey said, "when I've been getting sticks in the wood by the timber yard, I've heard her talking as if someone else were there. 'Go away, leave me,' I've heard her say, oh, quiet-like, for there never was any tempest that you could see about her. And once I heard her say, 'The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children.' She was stooping and picking some yellow sort of flowers—this spring it was. She straightens and looks up then. 'The God who said that,' she says, sharp-like all at once, 'had a sword in his hand. For it was a cruel thing to say.' That minute she sees me and colours up. I suppose I was staring too hard for her not to feel me there. 'I'm talking to myself, Mrs. Fairey,' she says. 'You know in the wood I often do. It's a wood full of the remembering of past things, Mrs. Fairey, don't you feel that?' she says. 'I don't let myself feel that way,' I says. 'It don't do.' She

comes along with me a bit dreamy then, but as nice as can be. There's nobody can be nicer than Mrs. Doddington when she likes. 'Do you know anything of Druids, Mrs. Fairey?' she asks me then. 'I've heard tell of 'em. A weird Welsh lot,' I say. 'High priests with beards like Caiaphas,' she says. 'That is how I always see them. And white robes. Old men cutting mistletoe with silver sickles under the moon and offering human sacrifices on mid-summer day. Mistletoe stands for love now,' she says after a minute. 'But I confuse things,' she says. 'You are thinking so. Mrs. Fairey, when you are very much alone as I am, you see too many likenesses in things.'

"'I often talks to myself,' I says, 'if that's what you mean, whenever I've got something on my mind. I reckon that's the best thing to do. For there's nobody wants to hear of the worries somebody else has got on their mind.' And I looked at her, for I didn't get her meaning quite clear and I don't know that I've got it clear yet."

Margaret took up her basket, then paused. "I think Mrs. Doddington has been ill a long time," she said.

As if she were answering her Mrs. Fairey spoke again. "It's a poor thing when you come to dying that you can't die in peace." She nipped off two dead geranium leaves. "I'll not forget to give these plants a drop o' water to revive 'em," she said.

"Oh, do," Margaret said. She hesitated once more. Then, with no other word spoken between them, her basket over her arm, she went away.

For convenience sake Anna lay in the long downstairs parlour that looked out on the garden and the wood. All the bed was white, Anna's face was greenish-white like the Maréchal Neal roses that stood in a brown wedgwood jug beside the bed. It was a pleasant room full of small squat armchairs of the sort that Queen Victoria might have sat in as a child, and a couch to match, standing on curved

walnut legs, both chairs and couch covered in white chintz, patterned in red and black and green, all of which Seth, who had taste in these matters, had bought at a sale. A grandfather clock, a picture of children playing at ball on its face, stood in a corner; there were books in two rows of shelves, and below them, on a third shelf, a row of china dogs, Stuart spaniels, looking melancholy and intransigent like Stuart kings. They were of all sizes, from the largest to the smallest. Anna had loved them when she was a child; she loved them still. They were almost the only things in the room that had been saved from the house in the timber yard. "Take them," Mrs. Tufton had said the day she had moved into the house by the wood, "stupid, staring things." And she had thrust them inside the door. Anna looked at them now. "You are always wishing you were back in France," she said. It was as though she twitted them privately.

Margaret came into the room. She kissed Anna and sat down. Instantly, whether from the glow of her cheeks, or the rich plum colour of her gown, or the warm reddish lights that still lingered in her dark hair, the room for all its pale walls and white, patterned chintz no longer seemed so cold. She spread her work on her lap.

"Anna, I forbid you to talk. I must think," she said.

Indeed, there were a great many matters to be decided in her mind: whether, for example, to invite the youngest of Edmund's four sons, John James Manifold Hill, to stay, and what, if Sarah accepted for him, to do to make the house even a little grander than it was. For John James, who had been delicate as a child, had been left with the Manifolds by Prue and Edmund when they set off with the older children to India and afterwards to South Africa. Since her own sons were grown up and men of the world, Sarah had been glad to welcome John James. He was delicate still, and used, in the Manifolds' house, to everything that was fine. Margaret's needle flew, and her

thoughts flew also. She came swiftly to a decision. Nothing could be done with the house; John James Manifold Hill should be invited, he could accept or not as he pleased.

She looked up. Outside in the garden the white butterflies were busy over the lavender blossoms, the marguerites showed bending and frail against the dark trees; the sun seemed caught over the garden and the wood, held stationary in its own haze of gold. And Anna was smiling at her and about to speak.

"People come and go around me as quietly as if this were a hospital ward. It's not. Why must I be so quiet? Even Ellen, when she calls to see me, comes creaking in on tiptoe," Anna said.

Margaret snipped twice smartly with her scissors. "Don't speak to me of Ellen." She re-threaded her needle, she began to turn down a long seam. "Barbara Nancy grows tall," she said, holding up her daughter's frock, "and taller. George Fairey remarked when he met her to-day that she was growing like a poplar tree. That pleased her." Margaret smiled at Anna. "Barbara Nancy has something, after all, of my famous vanity."

"I must have Mrs. Fairey oftener," Anna remarked on a parallel thought. "I'll tell Seth so." Frowning, she sat up in the bed. "There is my mother," she declared, all the old vexation in her voice.

Mrs. Tufton moved across the stretch of lawn outside Anna's window. She had a pair of garden shears in one hand, a gardening-basket half-full of weeds over her other arm.

Anna looked after her. "She insists upon doing things for me, though I hate to have her about me, though I hate the touch of her hands."

She stopped short and shivered then as if at some sudden fear and in the same moment her own hands came up and covered her face.

"What am I to do with you?" Margaret asked, startled in her turn and distressed and standing up. "What am I to do?" She bent over Anna, she took away her hands.

"They shan't triumph over me," Anna said, looking at her, this time very tense and strange.

"Will it matter if they do?" Margaret asked. "Anna, must you mind so much? Will they triumph for long? I mean, is any triumph for long?"

"You think I'll die," Anna said. "I know. I can tell. I don't wish to die. Never to see any more, never to feel any more, oh, it is impossible," Anna said, "to die. I have done so little, I have suffered, or imagined I suffered—what is the difference?—so much. I thought I would have ten children. I should then, I said, have ten friends. But I've only you. I've only the three people still, all I've ever had, all my world, not so many as the fingers of one hand. And of them all, Brock is only myself again, and Seth is no more than kind, and my mother is worse than strange." She paused and spoke quietly now. "As for Ellen, no one shall bring Ellen here," she said.

Margaret straightened in surprise. "Ellen?"

"James Peaslake has left her. At last," Anna said. "He has gone away and taken another woman with him, a quiet plump brown partridge of a thing. Ellen was crying her eyes out, Seth told me. 'No one has ever left her before,' I said. 'Ellen has a very feeling nature,' Seth replied. He was annoyed with me. 'Don't ever bring her here, ever,' I said. He did not answer. He seldom answers me now. He looks troubled, then becomes forgetful; something else more important than I am enters his mind, and he goes away. That is because I talk wildly," Anna said, "because I forget how helpless I am, how helpless I have made him. Afterwards I am sorry. To-day, when he left me for a moment, I felt that in order to please him I would even have Ellen here. But I won't." Anna lay back on the pillows. "I have pleased Seth too often, now that it is too

late I can see that. And with Ellen in the house I should never for a moment feel at peace."

"Anna!" Margaret spoke despairingly again. Take your heart from them, she wished to say. Be still in your mind. But Anna's mind was like a river at night, dark shapes in it, dark gleams, strange shadows of things not strange. Margaret got unhappily to her feet.

"Don't leave me." Anna put out a hand. "Stay. Wait until Seth comes."

Once more in a troubled fashion Margaret sat down. "Where is he?" she asked. She waited, her hands, that were trembling a little, folded in her lap.

"With Ellen." Anna spoke quickly in a brittle fashion. Ellen had written that she wished to sell everything, but not the black marble clock Seth had given her on her wedding day. She would never, Ellen had said, be parted from that. Here Anna tried to laugh and failed. She broke off and looked at Margaret. Only a sick knowledge now looked out of her eyes.

From pity and a queer sense of shame—for I am not pitiful enough, or helpful enough, she thought—Margaret turned away.

The garden gate opened. They could hear the cold fall of the iron latch. "There!" Anna cried, "there!" Sitting up in the bed, she pointed.

At first Margaret saw nothing, only the two yew trees, one on either side of the gate. "Only Seth, surely," she said.

"No." In a dreadful certainty Anna leaned over and caught in an odd awkward movement at her own feet through the covers of the bed. "Ellen. She's come. And she's come to stay. Look," Anna said, and pointed again.

Something furtive about her for all her apparent boldness, a black marble clock unwrapped under her arm, Ellen walked up the path.

"Now they will all be together against me," Anna said,

her head on her knees. "Now Ellen's black marble clock and time will tick together against me."

Within the house a door opened and shut quietly. There was a man's step on the hallway outside, and the sound of a stick being hung gently upon a wooden peg, and another door opening, then shutting again.

"That is Seth," Anna said, "come in by the field path so that I should not see. Oh, Seth," she cried in a storm of weeping now, "Oh, Seth, Seth!"

CHAPTER FOUR

SECOND CHORUS OF VOICES

MRS. DUMMETT and her friend Mrs. Daffin were once more taking tea. The business transaction which had brought them together—the sale of half a side of bacon from the Daffins's pig—was concluded; Mrs. Daffin was feeling complacent at the outcome, Mrs. Dummett, who had paid, she felt, something like a shilling too much, was feeling bruised and somewhat tart. Their chairs drawn together, the two women sat near the small window, screened by the pots of pink geraniums, that looked out on the village street. The clock on the wall ticked sonorously, a grey cat cleaned itself on the hearthrug, and Margaret Furness came running down her own short flight of steps and turned up the road that led to the wood and the Doddingtons' house.

Mrs. Daffin observed her. "Well, one thing," she remarked, "Mrs. Furness don't have to go over that nasty green field to the timber yard so many times now."

"What, is she off to Mrs. Doddington's?" Mrs. Dummett inquired.

"Don't never go nowhere else, does she?" Mrs. Daffin said. "Seen that ginger pop man lately?" she asked artfully, smoothing her apron as she spoke. "Well, it don't matter so much if you haven't, Ada. I daresay Tubbs'll do pretty well for hisself in the end."

"Ah, poor Tubbs," Mrs. Daffin said, first brightening, then sighing. "I have had a time with him. He come asking me again, Grace, and I told him I didn't see I could ever get out of the way of thinking of my poor Dummett. 'And that wouldn't be fair to you, Mr. Tubbs,' I said. It was then Mr. Tubbs took on. I never seen anybody take on like it. 'He's dead, Dummett is, dead, dead,' he says, 'and I've been askin' you and askin' you off and on for years, for twelve years, haven't I, and I've got blood in my veins and more than blood in my veins, haven't I? And I'm willing to marry you, ain't I?' he says, hollering again, 'and what more can a man do? But I won't have Dummett as well. Th' old muffin. He must have been that,' he says, meaning my poor George. 'Letting hisself be chased to death by a red deer. Why,' Mr. Tubbs says, 'I'd have throwed that animal a mile afore I'd have had him kill me. And that's broke that bubble, I hope,' he says, and he wipes his mouth. He goes outside then and brings in a big cask of ginger ale and bangs it down and out comes the bung. 'Mop it up,' he says, hollering at me again, 'mop it up. I've finished, I have, I'm off to Australyer, anywhere out o' the way o' Dummetts,' he says, 'though I'll be bound there's packs of 'em even there.' And he tears off out of my shop as if a hornet was after him, taking his leather apron off as he goes. Now why did Mr. Tubbs have to take that off, Grace?" Mrs. Dummett inquired.

"It wouldn't be because of any pop stains on it. No"—here Mrs. Daffin paused reflectively—"they wouldn't bother him. He must ha' done it, Ada, just to feel more respectable-like to himself. For it ain't in every man's nature to be proud of cartin' ginger pop about up and down

the country. Beer now, beer's different. Makes a man feel like a man, beer does, though it allays gives me the heecups," Mrs. Daffin said, and paused once more. "Now if it had been that boiled sweets man hollering and throwing casks about," she continued, "I wouldn't have been surprised. Ah, well, they do say a turning worm'll often make more stir than the Bull o' Bashan. And as for all that wasted pop, Ada, Jones and Fossett'll pay for that. They got heaps o' money, they have, and you've only got to ask for it, and it won't cost you more than a penny stamp."

"Oh, I couldn't, Grace, oh, the very idea," Mrs. Dummett said with a hopeful gleam.

"And Tubbs'll come back, just this once he will, something tells me," Mrs. Daffin said. "So don't you worry." She broke off. "Ah, there she is, Mrs. Furness, of course, she haven't stayed long."

"Oh," said Mrs. Dummett, who would still have liked to go on talking of Mr. Tubbs.

"They do say that Mrs. Doddington's gone a bit queer in the head from all the medicines the doctors have been givin' her," Mrs. Daffin began again. "Won't have so much as a cup of tea from the hands of her mother or Mrs. Peaslake, or whatever her name is—I never can remember, Ellen that was, I mean," Mrs. Daffin said—"only from her husband, or Jane Fairey, or Mrs. Furness. Says they're only waiting for her to die. I don't somehow reckon that's true, it's far-fetched," Mrs. Daffin said and waited.

Though words appeared to vibrate on Mrs. Dummett's lips, she did not speak.

"What man did you ever know that pined, Ada?" Mrs. Daffin asked then. "I mean what man was you thinking of some time ago when you said you did know of one man that pined for love. Was it Tubbs?"

Mrs. Dummett longed to speak, resolved not to speak, then threw away her resolve. "Robert Tufton," she said, and paused impressively.

"That's a new one to me, that is," Mrs. Daffin said.

Mrs. Dummett drew her chair nearer. "I had it from Jane Fairey," she said. "Jane came in about a fortnight ago so wrought up I suppose she had to speak. It appears that one day, a good many years back now, Jane was coming home when she sees Robert Tufton running fast as a long dog into the wood. Because she knows he's supposed to be ill and in his bed she follows him. But he goes pelting on, wearing nothing in the world, Jane says, but his white flannelette nightshirt. He comes out on the top of the bank and goes down all the steps to the garden two at a time as though old Harry himself was after him. And there's Bridget standing in the doorway of the house waiting, so Jane stays in the wood. He comes running up to his wife and says something Jane can't hear. 'You've run your last,' Bridget says. 'But afterwards I'll walk,' he says, 'you'll see.' He begins laughing then, and half-screeching after that. He's down on his knees in the porch next, and all that yallery-green stuff, that canary creeper, hanging all round him. 'You fool to go on like this,' Bridget says, looking and standing off from him a bit. It was then Jane comes running down to them. She couldn't help herself, I suppose, seeing him and the state he was in, and the two of them sweethearts before Bridget came along. He clings to her then, laughing and crying, Jane says, something dreadful to hear. And Bridget Tufton, as if she couldn't bear the sight of the two of them together, goes off then. It's Jane who puts him back to bed and covers him up. She leaves him quiet, and just as she's going off Bridget comes swooping down on her. 'Say that I am killing him, say that if you dare,' she says. 'For his sake I'll say nothing,' Jane says, 'but let this time be the last time,' Jane says. So she comes away. It was the next Sunday that Robert Tufton died.

"'There's killing by harshness,' Jane says when she tells me this. 'Is that murder or no?'

"'You might call it murder,' I says, 'but nobody'll ever bring it in that way.'

"'The truth'll find Bridget out,' Jane says, quite vindictive for Jane, 'the same as truth always does. There's a conscience in her,' Jane says, 'for all that she seems so hard. I shouldn't wonder if she don't feel it now.'

"'You be patient then and leave it, and don't go upsetting yourself,' I said. For I allays liked Jane Fairey. She's so harmless, Grace," Mrs. Dummett said. "But I'd better finish my tale.

"'A bearing of burdens you're never allowed to call your own, what a thing that is for a woman,' Jane says. 'I could have borne all Robert Tufton's burdens,' she says, 'if I'd been allowed, and they'd ha' been lighter than thistledown to me.' She goes off then and I've never set eyes on her to speak to since. But I knew what she had in her mind. She had Mrs. Doddington in her mind when she told me all that."

"There's Jane Fairey coming up from the timber yard now," Mrs. Daffin said. She put a finger inside her mouth and felt one of her teeth, which was loose, and wished to remark that it felt as big as a gravestone, but changed her mind. Instead—"I don't see what any of that's got to do with pining for love," she said.

"It's my belief Robert Tufton was in a manner o' speaking pining for Bridget all that time they lived together and never spoke," Mrs. Dummett said. "'Twas gentleness he wanted from his wife, the same as men of his sort allays do. But she's got no gentleness in her, Bridget hasn't, and never did have."

"Robert Tufton wasn't much good to his wife and no good at all to Jane Fairey, whether or no," Mrs. Daffin said, staring hard at her feet. "It's my belief he ought to

have had the one woman and been happy with her, or had the other and put up with her. But, no, he must go and make a misery of both. Born to be in a mess and leave a mess for other folk to clear up, that's the sort Robert Tufton was if you ask me. There's plenty of folks of both sexes like that about. And he ought not to have cut Bridget off all those years in the way he did. There's nothing worse for a woman, if you ask me, than heaping coals of silence upon her." Getting to her feet and shaking and bouncing the cushion she had been sitting upon, Mrs. Daffin prepared to take her leave.

She turned at the door. "Now mind what I said about that ginger-pop man, Ada—Amos Tubbs, or whatever he's called. If you don't have him, Pleasaunce Wayte will. She'd swallow her front teeth, big as they are, she's so anxious to get him. And if she haven't got your figure she've a hundred pound in the Sigbarrow Co-op, and that's something that'll last."

"Pleasaunce Wayte—Pleasaunce Wayte haven't got all her buttons," Mrs. Dummett said, following her friend out in some alarm.

"You look after Tubbs, all the same," Mrs. Daffin said. "Why, it's raining," she declared. "As for Daffin," she continued while unfurling her umbrella, "he don't earn much, and he don't say much, and he never did; and he's not handsome and he never was. But there's one thing about Daffin, nobody wants him but me, and that's a comfort, that is, and God be praised for it. Two women wanting the same man—Bedlam," Mrs. Daffin said. Almost hidden under the vast green umbrella which belonged to Daffin, Mrs. Daffin hurried away.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RIVER AND THE SEA

THE lattice windows were open and the night air came in, very cool and fresh from the little wood, and with it came the hushed stir and sound of the trees. Anna slept, a sleep as still as if she would not wake, a sleep as quiet and light as if she did not sleep at all. It was a sleep that might turn to anything, Mrs. Fairey thought, holding the light high over Anna, then turning pitifully away. The candle was snuffed out, the nightlight floated, a small arc of flame, in its shallow bowl. Mrs. Fairey, a cushion under her head, her feet on a stool, her hands, wrinkled and yellow-brown like walnuts, in her lap, composed herself for sleep. For if Mrs. Doddington should wake I should hear her, she thought. Presently, lulled by the night air and the quietness of the room and a sense of the deeper quiet outside, she slept.

The night wind lifted; it blew now far off, now near, bringing with it once more the faint sigh and sound of the trees; presently it was as if the wind itself stirred in the room. The stars shone piercingly in a cloud-flecked sky; in the wood the beech leaves showed black and curled against the moon.

Anna stirred. She had dreamed before: now the same currents of feeling moved her differently, her body that had been bound in sleep seemed free, her thoughts that had been submerged came nearer the surface, were possessed of a strange urgency; her brain, muffled and yet clear, moved in a strange way.

Anna walked in her sleep. With an odd softness and sureness she reached the window, she stepped down on to the gravel path; like a moth in the dusk she showed for a moment over the shadowed green of the lawn. She was in

the wood now, moving slowly down the narrow path between the still tree-trunks; and Mrs. Fairey, her arms wrapped in a grey shawl, followed her, troubled and half-afraid.

Anna turned. Mrs. Fairey stood still. It was almost as if Anna had seen her, as if she no longer walked in her sleep. For now she spoke aloud, her voice coming clear, then falling away. "Which is the real world, the world we dream, or the world we see? I dreamed I lived again, and that Seth was different, and I was different, and we were happy. So real a dream must in a different kind of world, I think, be true. But, truth or no truth, the division between things is not important for me any longer since I am alone. I am as alone in my bed as on a raft in the middle of the sea. And one day, I say to myself, the sea that is smooth under me, and still now, will carry me out, invisibly, away. For if death is anything," Anna said, "it is a great sea. And either I shall know everything, or I myself shall be nothing, and either way there will be no more doubts and no more questionings, and all the great sighs and sorrows I have made will shrink down to the smallest nothing. I was always afraid of the river," Anna said. "I am not afraid of the sea."

She went on again for a little way in silence. It seemed to Mrs. Fairey when next she spoke that her strength was failing her, for even her voice sounded tired. "Beside life," Anna said, "death, I tell myself, is nothing. For all the lives that have once been are swallowed up now in the dark, are part of the deep throb of the silence, the silence that I can feel now, that is in my room sometimes at night when a faint wind stirs; the silence that is in the wood, a curtain of silence pricked with the sharp points of the stars. And the dark, I say to myself, when I sleep, when I lie awake, when I am afraid—and I am often afraid, and for no reason, as if fear were something fetched up from the dark in me—the dark, I say, is not dense nor fearful, but full of voices and singing, and bright lights moving in, moving out. No

shadows. Only the sun makes shadows, the sun that makes everything else so clear."

She went on in silence again a little way, touching the trunks of the trees with both hands as she passed. Suddenly, her hands out and groping, her face lifted, she stood still. "But I can see no God." Now her voice rose to a cry. "And, oh, God forgive me, I can feel no hand."

"Mrs. Doddington, oh, come in," Mrs. Fairey said. "Oh, you poor soul, come in."

But Anna turned off the path deeper into the wood. She spoke more quietly now. "I shall be alone, there, among the million presences, in the moving dark, and this love that more than anything else has given me life will have gone from me, and all the fret, all the self-pain. And I shall go back once more, beyond the bright lights and the singing darkness, until at last all the voices are one, all the silences are joined in me."

She bent her head and turned then, and came swiftly out of the wood by the same way into the house, and Mrs. Fairey, her hands wrapped in her white apron now, turned also and followed her in.

It was quiet next morning; quiet as it was always now in the Doddingtons' house. The shadows on the lawn were spreading and cool, there were no white butterflies dancing yet over the flowers.

"It's bitter. Take it away," Anna said as the door of her room closed. To the closing door once again: "Take it away, please," she said.

Mrs. Fairey came into the kitchen, the early-morning tray in her hand. She faced Bridget Tufton. "She'll not have her tea." Trembling, she crossed the room and reached for her bonnet and cloak. "I don't know what's happening here, Bridget Tufton," she said, "but I don't like it. Anna's going beyond me like her father before her, going beyond you too, and that's well for them both."

"Anna is distraught," Bridget said. She waited.

"You should pity your own child that you brought her into the world," Mrs. Fairey said, tying her bonnet-strings. "But there's no pity in you."

"Pity! Who has ever pitied me?" Bridget asked. She came nearer. "Not you. For years there has been a good deal of criss-cross talk between us. Now it's time to speak plain. I was never all loving kindness. What woman can afford to be that? And I never loved Anna as a mother should. Why should I love Anna? Whenever I saw her I was reminded of what I wished to forget: folly and sin. That was what Anna was to me from the beginning. If I had not brought a child back with me, Robert Tufton might have forgiven me; he might in time have behaved differently. But Anna was always there. Anna is like her own father; they are as alike as two peas except that he had a way with him. When he chose he could wheedle the blood from your heart and all the sense from your head. But enough of that," Bridget said, sudden and hard. "I might have cared for Anna in my own way after my husband died, but she would have nothing from me. I'm telling you this, Jane Fairey, because once in a while it's good to speak. You'll keep quiet, I know, maybe only for fear that if you spoke the truth folk might think better of me. Because of Anna I had never the heart to be humble, I never dared show Robert the feeling I might. Instead of forgiveness, silence grew up between us. At first I would always break the silence with hard words. Even hurt, even hate was better, I thought. But the silence grew. I used to think it grew like mould. My husband nursed his own bitterness. He did that silently. There was nothing of recklessness in him; he reasoned too well for that. He would argue backwards: if this was so, that would follow. But nothing ever happens quite like that; there's not so much reason in the world. He was wrong about a number of things; he was never right about me. I turned cold. I was never cold in my life before. Mine had been a

piece of foolishness, or self-conceit. I'd gone out that morning partly out of bravado, to annoy Robert, meaning to go no further than the top of the lane, meaning to come back. But things didn't turn out that way.

"When at last I came back of my own free will Robert Tufton took me into the house. He fed me and the child; he gave me no word of anger or reproach. I would be forgiven in time, I thought; in more than appearances he would take me back. For what was forgiveness worth, I argued, if I was to be held at a distance? And I could never bear to be held at a distance by those I cared for. With every breath Anna took Robert hardened against me. He never touched me but the once after I came back, only the once before Ellen was born. I tempted him then in the wood, in the broad light of day. These things should be done in the dark. He never forgave me that, never forgave himself. There's a priest in a great many men; there was a priest in my husband," Bridget said. "There was nothing resembling a nun or a priest in me. After Ellen was born, when he did not change, when he did not even care for his own child, let it be so, I thought, let everything between us be as hard as you please. I was mistaken there. Hate is no colder than love, no harder. Hate is more hurtful, that is all." Bridget looked at Mrs. Fairey, and spoke quietly. "So in the end I punished myself."

"There's more to it than that," Mrs. Fairey said.

"If you are free of love as I am," Bridget said, "the will grows strong. There's only yourself in the world, Jane Fairey, never more than yourself."

Mrs. Fairey looked at her and did not speak.

"All your tenderness towards my husband, what was that?" Bridget asked. "It meant simply that you wished he had married you."

"Wherever you go you would make unhappiness," Mrs. Fairey said. "It's the hard strength you've got, and the cold overbearingness in you."

"Now you talk like Anna," Bridget said. She looked at Mrs. Fairey curiously. "What a pity Robert did not marry you," she said. Lightly and yet as arrogantly as any woman could, she walked away.

CHAPTER SIX

ECLIPSE

JOHN JAMES MANIFOLD HILL arrived towards the end of the holidays. He brought with him a wrist-watch, a bicycle and an airgun, three expensive novelties, all of which were objects of envy, though they would never have admitted it, to the young Furnesses. He brought no other outward signs of superiority. He was eager and alert in manner, thin and tall, with a high bony nose, bright dark eyes and an air of delicacy. To the astonishment of the Fisherman and the Philosopher and the delight of Barbara Nancy, he talked with a great deal of fluency on a number of subjects. He was, it seemed to them, excessively polite. He flew to open doors or pick up handkerchiefs. He walked up from Sigbarrow with old Mrs. Rainbow and carried her basket, and was offered, and declined, a pinch of snuff. "Should I have taken it?" he inquired earnestly afterwards, "I wonder if I should?"

The Furnesses at first received their new cousin with an air of guarded neutrality. They were a little suspicious of so much elegance and, perhaps because of it, a little uncertain of themselves. On the first day after his arrival, they crowded round the airgun. "Why do you want to shoot?" they asked. "We don't shoot," they said, looking at each other.

"But if you had a gun you would, wouldn't you?" their cousin said.

"And you ride too?" they asked, nodding at each other now.

"You would if someone lent you a horse, wouldn't you?" John James said again, an engaging candour on his face.

"Let's see you shoot," they said then, their neutrality melting before so much reason and friendliness.

A miniature rifle-range was set up in the garden at the back of the house: shots might be heard at any time of the day, while half a dozen or more youngsters crowded the neighbouring fence, ready to hoot the wild shots and huzza the bull's eyes. For John James, interesting enough to the Furnesses, was an object of intense curiosity to the village. He was said to possess the "heighth" of good manners; in this respect he was compared very favourably with Plompartay.

To-day, however, was Sunday and shooting was forbidden. An unnatural peace lay upon everything; the drone of the threshing-machine from the farm was still, and the smell and sound of Sunday dinners was hot and sizzling on the air. John James, the Philosopher, and the Fisherman, with Barbara Nancy as it were in attendance, were stretched irresolute and a trifle bored upon the square patch of lawn. There, before them, was the target, hanging askew on its nail; here, leaning against a post, was the airgun. The Fisherman picked it up, handled it lovingly for a second, then put it down with the air of someone who puts temptation away. The Philosopher took a turn up the garden and a turn down again, while Plompartay disappeared with a furtive air into the woodshed.

The Philosopher gazed after him with a mild but vacant eye. "What's he up to?" he inquired. "Dressing up or something, I suppose," he said.

"He's always something," Barbara Nancy said. "Something he isn't, I mean," she explained.

Because they were bored they were inclined to be inimical also. Barbara Nancy rearranged the dark blue bow which

ornamented the front of her white dress. "I'm a Liberal. I've a picture of Mr. Gladstone in my old rabbit-house."

"My uncle is a Conservative. My uncle has a picture of Mr. Gladstone at the bottom of his chamber-pot," John James said.

"I call that stupid," the Fisherman said.

Barbara Nancy looked over her shoulder. From behind the toolshed door a hand first appeared, then withdrew, leaving a piece of cardboard dangling from the latch. She advanced a few steps. "H. Furness. Privet," the inscription, in large unequal letters, said.

"Stupid, that is just what my uncle is not," their cousin declared, and he put a finger inside the starched collar that he wore and wriggled it about.

Why, he's cross, in a polite sort of way, Barbara Nancy thought. She felt pleased for some reason and sat down once more upon the lawn.

"Of course I don't care for politics," John James announced in an aloof fashion.

"We do. We are Liberals," they chorused.

"I suppose there have to be Liberals," their cousin conceded, momentarily taking the wind out of all their sails. "I shall be a Conservative like my uncle. I shall probably stand for Parliament," he said.

With a loud buzz they were all upon him. "We thought you did not care for politics."

"I don't either." John James sat down in the only chair and crossed his legs and looked very calmly at them.

"Now you look like a Member of Parliament, oh, you do, you cross your legs like one," Barbara Nancy said. "I shall be a historian," she declared. "But historians don't earn very much money. Nobody likes history except about Charles the First and Mary Queen of Scots. And nobody would have cared about them if he hadn't had his head cut off and if she hadn't had so many husbands. I like love stories best myself," she added.

"Personally I don't care a fig about love," John James said, pursing his lips. "Either I love everybody or I love nobody."

"Are you really clever?" Barbara Nancy asked, scepticism and wonder mixed.

"I'd like to be a trapper in the Arctic or in the Yukon Valley." The Fisherman spoke gloomily and partly to himself, for no one was addressing anybody in particular and the words flew about in the air.

"I shall lie abed and scheme," the Philosopher said, and he rolled over on to his back and looked sleepily at the sky.

Their mother went past them as if she were going out. Though she looked at them for a moment as she passed she did not smile.

"If it weren't Sunday—" the Fisherman took up the air-gun again and squinted along the barrel.

At that moment the woodshed door opened and Henry, in feathered head-dress, in full war-paint, tomahawk in hand, came charging out. In the same second, as though fired by an invisible hand, the gun went off, and Henry, who was now about twenty yards distant, executed a comic and yet terrifying skip, dropped the tomahawk, and letting out a yell, clapped both hands to the seat of his knicker-bockers. He turned round, tears of fright and fury in his eyes.

"Oh, Plom." Barbara Nancy ran forward. It would be Plom. He gets everything, even the bone, she thought despairingly.

At this stage their father descended upon them, shooting, as the Philosopher said later, fierce glances to right and left. But Plompartay, who was not to be questioned or cosseted, charged off like a small wounded animal into the gooseberry bushes and thence, through a number of holes in various neighbouring fences, into the road again.

"It was really my fault." John James began very gallantly to apologize for his airgun.

"Don't be so darned noble," the Fisherman, wounded himself in an odd way, cried. "I held the gun, though I didn't fire it. It went off," very shortly he said.

While consternation and alarm were still about them like a host of shooting stars, the Philosopher pulled a crumpled green paper printed in splotched black type from his pocket, and, stretched out once more upon the grass, began to read. As he read the air of comic detachment which he usually wore receded: the Philosopher ceased to be so very philosophical; he became both weighty and absorbed.

Barbara Nancy lay down beside him. "Where have they got to?"

Silently the Philosopher indicated the page and the place.

"Reading," he said. "Now there will be a great battle and we shall lick 'em. Reading's a fort, you see."

"It can't be." Barbara Nancy sat up. "They make biscuits there. Chocolate wafer biscuits like plum stones." She remembered them. Once more no one answered her.

John James came and looked over the Philosopher's shoulder. At once he also became absorbed.

"The Germans have got to Reading," the Philosopher explained patiently for the second time. "We'll lick 'em in next week's number, see if we don't." As if to close the discussion he folded the paper up and slipped it into his pocket again.

"There might, just possibly, be a war between ourselves and Germany," their cousin declared.

They prepared to listen politely. From the way in which John James was pulling down his top lip they felt certain he was going to talk a great deal.

"I hear a tremendous amount of talk about war," their cousin said. "We want to avoid being drawn in, of course, my uncle says, but this understanding we have with France makes it almost impossible. We don't expect to avoid war, and yet we are not doing anything in earnest to be prepared for war. Madness, my uncle says. Even if we do catch

up with the enemy in the end, it's madness not to be prepared, madness to have to waste so much time and so many lives. Look at the Boer War, my uncle says, see what mistakes we made there." John James paused. Everyone continued to look at him politely. "Anyhow, all wars seem pretty silly to me, and useless besides," he said.

"Only useless if you've got everything," the Fisherman, leaning against a post and looking argumentative, interrupted him.

"Have we got everything? In the Empire, you mean. I suppose we have." John James paused thoughtfully.

"Well, I've shot Plompartay for a start," the Fisherman said, going off, a look about his mouth that was tight and queer, that was not like him, that did not belong to anything that had been said. For while John James had been discoursing of war, the Fisherman had been thinking about himself. "I am to go to a new school and learn Latin and Greek," Barbara Nancy had announced only that morning. The Fisherman had stared at her. Only Barbara Nancy, he had thought. Because of great-uncle Edwin's money. Because there are too many of us for our own money to go round. And I am to go nowhere. I can never be a draughtsman now; I must be a mechanic instead. All my life I must be something I never wanted to be. Of course I don't mind about Barbara Nancy, he had told himself quickly. I only mind about myself. The worm of discontent which had been gnawing at him for days burrowed deeper now. He turned by the gooseberry bushes and came back once more.

His sister was watching him with a troubled face. She knows, he thought. We've no money; nobody without money has much of a chance to do anything they want to do, he thought again. To have to do without staying longer at school meant that you could never catch up with the rest, no matter how hard you worked or tried. You could teach yourself, yes. But how long would it take? Learning to

learn meant you started off blind. It meant that you ended up by being half-taught. Everything John James was, everything John James said, convinced him of that. My cousin is no better than I am, no cleverer, he is only richer and more fortunate, the Fisherman thought.

He had tried to speak to his father. Couldn't I stay at school and work in the evenings and pay for myself? he had wished to say. His father had cut him short. He had spoken angrily, as if he were driven by some deep dissatisfaction in his own mind. "There are too many pairs of feet under my table," his father had said.

Since then the least difference between his father and himself, which at any other time would have been laughed over or explained away, turned into unpleasantness again. I'm not wanted, the Fisherman had told himself repeatedly of late, not altogether believing it, not altogether disbelieving it either. No one need have been angry, he had told himself. It's not my fault I am one of four children. When you are poor you have to throw your children out of doors, he thought now. There was no comfort for him in the thought. He moved on again.

Barbara Nancy stood up and dusted herself down. "This is a horrid day," she pronounced crossly, her thoughts divided between the Fisherman and a green and mauve caterpillar she had just sat upon.

"When will it be dinner-time?" The Philosopher yawned, looking up at a sulphur-coloured cloud that was reared on end like a giant stone beside the sun.

Henry came importantly up the path. "I've got sticking-plaster on," he announced and beamed at them.

An air of urgency about her, their mother came walking quickly into the house once more. This time she did not look at them nor speak. Presently they heard rather than saw her go out again.

While all this was happening the day itself, which had been bright enough before, was as though transformed.

The sky—quite suddenly they were aware of it—appeared heavy and overcast and a thin film of greyish cloud was to be seen spreading over the face of the sun. The quiet appeared something more than a mere Sunday quiet. There was a heaviness, almost a kind of breathlessness about it, even a suggestion of waiting. The Philosopher, who had taken his paper out from his pocket again, once more put it away as if it had become too dark to read. He opened his mouth soberly and was about to speak. In the same second the same thought occurred to them all. Looking at each other, they spoke at once: "The eclipse. It's the eclipse of the sun."

"A partial eclipse, isn't it?" John James frowned and took a newspaper cutting from an inside pocket of his coat and frowned over it again.

"You must be simply full of newspaper cuttings and things," Barbara Nancy said, observing him. No one spoke.

At once she felt, as she was often to feel in later years on similar occasions, under pressure of somewhat similar silences, frivolous and, in some way which eluded her, irrelevant also. She looked from one to the other of them and became acutely conscious of herself. With that sense of fitness and decorum which all men, of whatever age, possess, the boys were staring upwards. The greyish film was spreading over the sun's face like a vast shadow.

The Fisherman, who had gone off so abruptly, appeared again. Pieces of smoked glass, carefully prepared weeks ago and forgotten since, were handed out. Their cousin, who had not been thought of when preparations were being made for the eclipse, was given, as though by right, Barbara Nancy's piece of glass. She could identify it as hers because of the round moon face with little pig eyes which she had drawn in one corner.

"I shall look over your shoulder," she announced.

"You may," her cousin agreed politely. Politeness in these circumstances appeared almost like offence and some

kind of retort hovered on Barbara Nancy's lips. After all, she wished to remind John James, it is my glass. Look at that moon face on it, she wished to say. She said nothing. She held her lips tight-closed.

"You have to look through glass at one stage," the Fisherman announced in faintly episcopal tones.

What a fuss! Barbara Nancy told herself suddenly. There —at once she recognized it—the irrelevance was out. She stood on one leg. She half-squinted with both eyes. Now I am like Old Shut-Eye, she thought. Shut-Eye was the name given to the heron that sometimes visited the Basin Hole. "What is the matter with you?" the Fisherman inquired crossly. "Well, what is?" she wished to ask. Once more, with her usual forbearance, she said nothing. She sighed. She stood on both legs. Immediately, and not altogether to her satisfaction, she became herself again.

Every moment, with a horrid certainty, the darkness crept nearer. Now it was like dusk at mid-day. Now even the birds were still. Here was the dark coming, not as it came at night in slow ordered motion from the other side of the hill, but swiftly, falling from the heart of the sky, surrounding things and separating them, coming between the four of them and the lavender hedge, seeping down visibly like mist. The boys' faces as they looked through their pieces of smoked glass were shadowed and intent. Before them, in the heavens, it was as though some battle were being joined between the sun and the moon's shadow; here, on earth, instead of light was almost darkness, the queer as though candle-lit shadows of things on the warm soil, the cold stones. And the clocks, so it seemed, appeared to be striking louder than they had ever struck before or would ever strike again; the church clock, the clock on the farm stables, the clock on the school, twelve and again twelve, each stroke treading close on the heels of the one before like country dancers. That the sun should be shut out, that there should be dimness and darkness always,

Barbara Nancy thought, and discovered a certain fearful pleasure in her own alarm.

A partial eclipse of the sun, everyone had said, and a partial eclipse of course it would be. They waited. Second succeeded second; their cousin looked at his watch. The Philosopher, who had put his nose too near the lampblacked glass, brought out his handkerchief and applied the tip of his tongue to a corner. The sparrows, as sparrows do before night-time, started a small sparrow quarrel in the darkness of the holly tree, and muted it abruptly, and were still. Now only a third of the sun's face showed. Now, as they waited, it became darker even than before.

In a queer suspense—queer because all reason was against any feelings of suspense at all—they continued to wait. Out of a sudden feeling of loneliness Barbara Nancy pressed nearer John James's shoulder.

As they waited, the light of the sun, strengthening minute by minute, began to show faintly once more through the pale smoky film of shadow. Now the light, not silver-gilt but gold, shone from the face of the sun itself; the shadows dissolved again, they seemed to fly away. The light was red on their fingers now, warm again on the smoked glass. Suddenly, as if it were a messenger of the end, a bird like a thrush launched itself through the air with a loud clap of wings.

"That's all," the Fisherman said, phlegmatic again, throwing down the glass.

At once they were conscious of a feeling of boredom mixed with relief. "This is the end of the concert," the Philosopher said. It was all over, they thought, turning away. One by one the bees returned to the lavender blossoms and the tortoiseshell butterflies lit once more on the stonecrop and the clumps of thyme in the path. There was nothing left of the eclipse, except the quietness that was like heaviness in the air and the faint milky greyness that would not leave the sky.

His hands in his pockets, the Fisherman strolled down the path towards the house once more, and Barbara Nancy came after him. John James and the Philosopher followed, John James looking very bright and alert, the Philosopher looking about him, as he always did, as if the world were his garden and all time were before him. As he passed the woodshed he peered in. Extending a long arm, he withdrew it again. "Now we know," he said, "now we do." Dangling from one finger by a loop of string was a square piece of white cardboard. "Here it is," the Philosopher said again, and held it up. With an air of solemnity he hung the piece of cardboard upon the latch of the door. Swaying a little, it hung lopsidedly there. "The Last of the Moicans," the inscription on the card read, in crooked letters, in Plompartay's spelling, in Plompartay's hand.

The Furnesses paused and looked at each other. The Last of the Mohicans, the last of the holidays, they may have thought. Feeling, which is often obscure, which almost always leaps ahead of thought, may have gone deeper with them. While they did not cease to look stolid a certain added solemnity showed for a moment upon every face. Heaviness and a vague sense of impending loss and change invaded them, it may be, in the same instant, not indeed for the first time, but more recognizably now. The end of the holidays, and everything will be different, they thought. A small keen wind, freshening down the narrow channel of garden, caught the corner of the faintly swinging sign and turned it neatly over, its face towards the door.

Barbara Nancy was the first to arrive in the house. As if anticipating some new turn, though what, apart from the possibility that it might have to do with Mrs. Doddington, she could never have said, she stood by the door. Her mother and father were talking just beyond her hearing within the small sitting-room. Her mother's voice reached her suddenly, not loud, but poignant as she had never heard

it yet: "She was not fit for life. And yet she could not bear to die."

"That poor devil, Seth," her father said, "that poor silly devil!" He got up from his chair and cleared his throat and came nearer the door.

Barbara Nancy came a step forward so that she could be seen and leaned her head in a sick fashion against the wall. Her mother called to her, her voice sharp with anxiety and distress. But her father crossed over to her, and, sitting down once more, drew her between his knees.

"Go over to Mrs. Fairey's house and ask her to come to Mrs. Doddington's. Quick, but not too quick," he said, smiling at her, but smiling mostly with his eyes, and holding her for another second as if he would talk to her without words.

A moment later, walking fast, but not too fast, she was gone, looking at no one, seeing only the green field and the faint sulphur-coloured clouds in the sky.

"I'll come this minute," Mrs. Fairey said, taking her clean apron from its peg and tying it behind her, and smoothing with both hands the wide middle parting of her hair.

Not waiting for her, Barbara Nancy hurried away. She did not wish to go back into the house, and, after wandering here and there, presently, as if she had intended this always, she found herself in the wood opposite the Doddingtons' house. The house itself was quiet; a bantam cock, orange and yellow and red, perched on the garden gate and crowed lustily; the sunlight lay in a yellow pool on the path and filtered yellow and still through the trees. Every now and then a horse chestnut fell with a soft thud and burst, or a brown leaf spiralled down.

Her knees drawn up to her chin, Barbara Nancy waited. Some sort of certainty was what she sought, some satisfactory answer to all that was vaguely troubling her mind. "She was not fit for life. She could not bear to die." Barbara Nancy waited, but still no answer and no certainty came. The wood was as empty and yet as full as before, as

empty of sound and people, as full of quietness and moving air and leaves.

The wood was empty, and then it was full again, too full. Brock Doddington came stumbling towards her down the wide path of the wood, hiccupping and sobbing as he came. The sun that was high overhead shone full on his face; his coat was striped with shadows from the trees. There was something angry and despairing, something crouched and broken about him as he came. And all this, Barbara Nancy knew instinctively, was grief.

"Take that," he said, "and that," striking blindly with the flat of his hand as he passed at the trunks of the trees.

Barbara Nancy shivered then. Feeling was sick and heavy within her. As if I were Brock, she thought, as if what Brock feels were in me. She pressed her chin closer in until it hurt between her knees. "Don't sing," she prayed fiercely to the birds, her eyes closed. And then, differently, "Don't let any bird sing."

Since this was high summer and the songless season, the wood, except for the stir of the wind and the light movement of leaves, was still. Barbara Nancy opened her eyes. Arms outstretched, hands clenching and unclenching before him, Brock wept face downwards among the fallen twigs, the dry last summer's leaves. He wept; his head was hidden, only his shoulders moved.

From so much grief, Barbara Nancy, unseen and unheard, turned and fled. Brock's voice, angry and racked with tears, followed her. "Come back. Oh, come back. Will you never come back? Never, never," he said.

Anguish at her heels, Barbara Nancy ran on, and the trees, it seemed to her, ran beside her a little way, and bent over her, then straightened again, and she was out of the wood.

PART IV

BUGLES ON THE TWENTY-FOURTH OF MAY

EVERYONE, Barbara Nancy observed from her seat beside Tamlin under a lime tree, was going the same way. A profound remark, Tamlin, who had been staying with them for the past fortnight, said. It was the twenty-fourth of May, nineteen hundred and twelve, and to-day, for the first time in history, the parishes of Sigbarrow and Alne, in common with a great many other parishes all over England, were about to celebrate Empire Day. Although in previous years Sigbarrow and Alne had held back from this quite voluntary feast, this year they had decided, for reasons which were perhaps not properly understood by everyone, to take part. Their decision was a matter as much of instinct as of reasoning. The famous rattling of the German sword at Agadir in the previous summer, while it had not succeeded in raising the hair of one Englishman, had yet drawn a great many peaceful British folk together. It was felt, however vaguely, in Sigbarrow and Alne, as indeed all over Britain, that the time had come to show that we were indeed a family and united.

The reasons, important though they were, were almost lost sight of in the event. Preparations, as thorough as if this were another Coronation feast, had been in hand for weeks. Seth had spent every moment of his spare time going from one farm to another, from one house to the next, equipped with a thin red note-book labelled Sigbarrow and Alne Empire Day Festivities, Seth Doddington, Collector. Eighty pounds had been raised and more promised, all of it to be consumed in beef and ham and mutton, in beer and cider and buns and tea, in prizes for the sports

events and for the greasy-pole contest. The day was sunny and warm. The lime trees drooped heavy green leaves on boughs that fell steeply like peacocks' tails; the sun, in a fierce spring radiance, slid over the gilded faces of the buttercups in the water-meadows, over the great stars, like garter stars, of dandelions in the grass. The wind blew damp and warm from the south, and the scents came with it, the scent of hawthorn and apple blossom, of the wild grasses and all the flowers; the butterflies followed, tossing brown and white and yellow brimstone sails over the nodding red tassels of the green sorrels. Out of the faint mists of morning into the blueness of dusk the birds sang; never, people said and marvelled, never had there been such a year for blossom and birdsong.

The crescent curve of the small houses showed bright and small in a sea of green under a vast cloud-flecked blueness of sky. The flag, a Union Jack, waved boldly from the flagstaff, and the children, drawn up in orderly rows, were shining and clean as September asters washed by the rain. In ones and twos, in threes, in little family groups, people were coming out of all the small houses, others still were arriving on foot from Sigbarrow; one or two horses and traps, one or two old-fashioned gigs were being tied up to the trees. Mrs. Dummett—Mrs. Dummett no longer, but Mrs. Amos Tubbs—came out a little self-consciously from her shop; Mr. Tubbs followed her. The brewer's van, decked with red, white and blue ribbons and piled high with barrels, rolled past; the Sigbarrow and Alne Royal Victoria Band followed. The brake swayed, the bandsmen, cased tightly in their blue uniforms with white facings, swayed with it; the sun shone on the brass instruments, like brass convolvulus flowers, that rested upon their knees, on the cheerful hard red faces under the new-fashioned peaked uniform hats. Now, a signal that everything of importance was about to begin, Seth himself arrived, and George Fairey, who was known to be as punctual as a clock,

was also to be seen, moving largely, like one of his own cart horses, over the field.

While waiting for everything to begin Barbara Nancy shut her eyes. In less than a moment she had travelled backwards in time. "Brothers, by that journey upon which I am bound," she remembered. Queen Katherine Howard from the scaffold to the people of London could call them brothers; looking down on eternity, she could speak of that "journey upon which I am bound." The Fisherman a week from now would be gone on a different journey. A journey to Canada, where everything, almost from the beginning, was new. Whenever the thought of the Fisherman's departure came to her Barbara Nancy thrust it away into the dark. She turned quickly now and addressed Tamlin.

"Do you know anything of Queen Katherine Howard?"

"A hussy," Tamlin said. He tapped Barbara Nancy's knee with one long square-tipped finger. "Come back. It's rash to travel so far."

I know only history. History is almost all that a girl at my sort of school is allowed to know, Barbara Nancy thought. She said as much. Then, in a voice that sounded more stoical than depressed, "It's no good," she declared. "If you are fifteen you are bound to be unsatisfactory somewhere."

"Quite right," Tamlin said. He got to his feet. He addressed the day and the festivities generally. "Hurry up, do. You're late."

Matters were, in fact, moving faster than Tamlin supposed on the other side of the road. Miss Garner, who always led the Sunday School in singing, the mauve scarf of the W.S.P.U. draped like the ribbon of the Garter across the portly front of her white shirt-blouse, had already taken her seat at the harmonium, and the children were already putting their heads on one side and opening their mouths and looking, indeed, like choristers in stained-glass windows.

"We salute thee," they sang almost at once, and the wind in a sudden warm gust caught the words in the folds of the flag and flung them wide into the air. "We salute thee," the children sang again. Each one, as he sang, raised his right hand a little awkwardly and looked up, or attempted to look up—for the sun was in all their eyes—at the flag. "And we pray," they sang again, "God to bless our land to-day."

Stirred and warmed by the singing, Barbara Nancy listened. I believe in liberty, I believe in myself, she thought confusedly. Made conscious of her own emotions and a little alarmed by them, she turned her head. Where will so much feeling take me? I hate too much enthusiasm. I like to be cool. Without intending to do so she looked almost pleadingly at Tamlin.

"Love of it across the waters," the children sang shrilly, "Passing with electric thrill, Binds our distant sons and daughters, Heart to heart with Britain still."

"Appalling!" Tamlin said, and, irreverently, "Lord, what rubbish." He leaned forward in disgust, then tilted arrogantly upon his heels. Although other members of the crowd cast curious or disapproving glances upon him, he did not appear to care. The only person whom I must please, he had said yesterday, and Barbara Nancy remembered it with renewed surprise, is myself.

"I'm off." Suddenly and disconcertingly he tapped her again, this time upon the shoulder.

A small wind lifted the children's white pinafores, rustled the tender leaves of the lime trees; a few drops of rain fell, fading out in Barbara Nancy's blue print frock, lying like dark full moons on the stones of the path. When the singing and saluting were over, Tamlin was already out of sight under the dark shade of the beech trees, and the children, dismissed at last, came tumbling and leaping, a many-coloured cascade, down the school steps into the road.

When Barbara Nancy arrived at last at the water-

meadows, having dawdled over the field path, the speech of the day was about to begin. There, before her, upon the red-carpeted platform, was the small, alert figure, the brown face scored with a hundred wrinkles, the shrewd twinkling smile known to half the youth of the world. The sun shone out, the important ladies of the neighbourhood sat back in their chairs with a final rustle of petticoats, and the speech, which was not only for the occasion, but for the hour, began.

Never did Barbara Nancy's thoughts go out on more gossamer errands than on occasions such as these. She listened dreamily. Nevertheless, like a learned judge who dozes during the hearing of a long suit, she was always able to gather enough of what was said for her own purposes. To-day, the great man, like all practised speakers, drove the same point home again and again with light, then heavier hammer blows of words. "What was it the thrush sang?" he asked. "Be prepared," he answered, "be prepared." Britain must be prepared to defend herself if she were threatened, to fight back if she were attacked. Now, like a stage property, a thrush did indeed sing for a moment from the willows on the opposite bank. "There, you can hear it: Be prepared, be prepared," the great man, twinkling down at them all, said.

I can't hear it, Barbara Nancy thought, frowning.

There is Barbara Nancy, her mother thought, making crooked railway lines of frowns upon her forehead. She looked about her and scarcely listened. How much taller the trees have grown since I came here first, her thoughts went; how much older I am, and yet I have not changed. Every occasion is still my occasion; my world even now revolves around me. But not for long, she thought with a sudden sinking of heart, oh, not for long. From this moment onwards my world grows smaller. It will grow smaller yet, until all the children are grown-up and separated from me, until once more there are only the two of us, only

Edward and myself. Out of a need for reassurance she smiled at Barbara Nancy; she no more than touched her husband's arm. Demonstrativeness in public was something for which Edward did not care. While I would be demonstrative anywhere, whenever I wished, she thought, smiling.

The Philosopher and Plompartay were stretched out, a bottle of ginger pop between them, under an alder tree. "What's he saying? Can you hear him, Plom?" the Philosopher inquired sleepily. For answer Plom did no more than hiccup fuzzily and delightfully into the grass.

How is it possible for us to prepare ourselves if no one will show us how? The Fisherman shifted uneasily on his feet. What else except what we are doing can we do?

For his part Tamlin was unconvinced. He had heard it all—here he exaggerated—a hundred times. What politicians' game was this? he asked. The Agadir crisis was over; Germany had climbed down. No doubt Europe held plenty of inflammable material still. But no country nowadays would wish to make war. At bottom all nations were alike; at bottom all peoples wanted the same things until their government and leaders persuaded them differently. If war came, of course he would fight. I'd always want to stop the other fellow, he told himself, whoever the other fellow was. But I shall never be wanted. I shall get on with mining and go to South Africa, or Australia, or even Russia —anywhere remote enough, anywhere sufficiently far away. His hands in his pockets, he sauntered off. He was determined never to allow himself to be deceived.

The votes of thanks and the applause that followed the speech were soon over. The great man himself, the Reverend Beauchamp Walters, all the gentlemen, all the important ladies, stepped down in their proper orders and degrees from the platform. Barbara Nancy drifted away with Brock Doddington. He had been trying for some time, and almost everyone in the crowd except Barbara Nancy herself had been aware of it, to attract her attention. Seth crossed over

to Margaret and Edward. Ellen, tiptoeing over the grass —like a wasp up a window-pane, the Philosopher, opening one eye and observing her, remarked—followed. Since Anna's death Seth would always bring Ellen with him if it were possible, and, with a gentle persistency, thrust her upon the Furnesses. That, Margaret had remarked a shade unpleasantly, on a previous occasion, was Seth's way of establishing the new relationship, if indeed it was new, between Ellen and himself. But I will never forget Anna, she had added both aloud to her husband and silently again to herself.

She was always polite to Ellen; she was polite to her now, not looking at her, holding herself stiff and aloof. "Your mother stepped straight out of the ice-box," Edward said, joking with his family afterwards.

The Fisherman strolled here, strolled there, looking at everything, noting nothing very much. He halted at last by the greasy pole. It was oiled and shining for the contest, and the sacks stuffed with straw with which to belabour your opponent were laid neatly to one side. Tamlin walked round with him. "I'll have a shot at this too," Tamlin said. For some reason he appeared pleased.

"It needs practice." The Fisherman spoke coldly. Tamlin was too cocksure about everything, it seemed to him. He turned away. Quite soon I'll be gone from here; I'll never come back: the thought, always in the background of his mind, thrust itself forward again. Already he was aware of the paralysis of feeling that comes before every leavetaking. If I could go at once, his mind repeated, if quite suddenly it might be all over and behind me. Already, it seemed to him, from the first moment that his decision was taken he had said goodbye.

He waited. Her full skirt swinging about her long black-stockinged legs, Moll Mainwaring came towards him. "Waiting for me?" She tilted her chin and smiled at him.

The Fisherman looked intently at the white face, the

mass of dark hair, at the light blue eyes under the dark slanting brows. "Yes," he said, rather slow and fierce.

"I'm going away, I'm going to Rhyl for a holiday," Moll informed him. She shook back her hair.

"I must see you before I go. I must. Could we meet here?"

"Aren't I here already?" Moll put a hand on her hip challengingly, and cocked her head on one side. At sight of the Fisherman's tense face she relented then. She remembered what she had just confided to her best friend, Joyce Manners. "Of course I've heaps of boys," she had said to Joyce, "simply heaps. But John Furness is different somehow. He's serious." She resented John's seriousness; she was flattered by it also.

She swallowed lightly. She struck a simpler pose. "I'll come back," she promised. With a bright nod and a wave of her hand, with another whisk of her skirts, Moll, walking with an exaggerated swing from the hips, was gone.

The Fisherman looked after her. He knew that she was light, that she was not to be trusted. He was no wiser for knowing, only more despairing. There was an odd salty bitterness in his thoughts. She'll be on with the Philosopher when I've gone, or on with someone else. And to-morrow week I'll be gone. Why, I've gone already, he told himself once more.

Because he could no longer bear his own company he crossed to the other side of the field in order to speak to George Fairey. George, who was never far from carts or horses, was leaning thoughtfully against the empty brewer's dray.

"You're going out there too, George," the Fisherman said. "Sailing about the same time as well. Do you think we'll meet?"

George chewed thoughtfully on a piece of grass. "No chance on it, lad."

"I suppose not." The Fisherman looked away.

"They plough wi' tractors out there," George said. He changed from one elbow to the other. "I'd liefer have a team o' horses."

"It'll be fun anyway," the Fisherman said. He spoke doggedly. "People are alive out there. They're half-dead here." He stopped short. "No, that's not true. I don't mean it," he said. Once more he looked away.

"Summat in it though," George said.

Their thoughts kept company for a second. Once more they saw what they had always seen, what for them had always been there: the curve of the river, the chequered green and gold and purple of the fields, the great trees holding up the pale skies, and the white road, no beginning to it, no end.

"Well, I'll be going, I'll say goodbye." The Fisherman spoke on the same dogged note. But still he did not move. "So long, and the best of luck," at last he said. Hunching his shoulders a little in the grey flannel coat, he walked away.

"So long, and the same to you, lad," George's voice called after him a second too late. That was like George, the Fisherman told himself, without looking back, while still walking away. Punctual in everything else, George was always a little behindhand with his thoughts.

Brock, who was in scout's uniform, had been discoursing to Barbara Nancy of half a dozen scout matters upon which, she was convinced privately, he could as yet know little. Now, as if to furbish himself for the lists, he took out a pocket comb and combed his hair.

She touched the fluttering shoulder knots. "Being a scout is like playing at Red Indians, isn't it?" She walked on. "But then you like pretending."

Brock came after her. "Don't you ever pretend?"

"I don't pretend very well." She frowned. She continued to walk on ahead. "I suppose I am one of those people who pretend never to pretend."

Once more Brock halted and smoothed his hair. "Oh, you need not be so honest, you know. Why shouldn't people pretend?"

"Did I pull that out of the river? Did I?" Tamlin inquired, looking at Brock, and speaking half to himself and half to Plompartay.

Plompartay stared disapprovingly at Tamlin out of large, rather full blue eyes. We think Brock is all right, his look very clearly said. "I've had too much ginger pop. If I'd had cider I'd be asleep. Cider is better than pop for that reason," he said.

"Quite right," Tamlin remarked. The only time Tamlin agreed with you was when he wasn't listening. Even Plompartay could see that. And then Tamlin always said, "Quite right." Plompartay detached himself from Tamlin and went to lie down under another tree.

In the same moment Brock caught sight of Tamlin. He came forward awkwardly. "I know you. We've met before."

"I pulled you out of the river," Tamlin said.

"And told me to take castor oil, I remember."

"That was for being a bit of an ass." Tamlin grinned unexpectedly.

"I have hardly ever been in that part of the river since, you know," Brock said.

"I suppose not," Tamlin replied.

There was a pause, a not very comfortable pause, Barbara Nancy felt.

Tamlin stooped. "This yours?" He looked bored and held out a pocket comb.

"You always have me at a disadvantage," Brock said, taking the comb and standing very stiffly and looking at Tamlin, then going away.

"Why," Barbara Nancy began, "do you have to be so, so——" She reddened and stopped short.

"So unpleasant?" Tamlin suggested amiably.

"So uncomfortable," she said.

"I think perhaps it makes me feel important," Tamlin said and half-smiled.

"Can't you be important any other way?" Barbara Nancy tapped impatiently with one foot.

"Not so easily." He grinned at her. "Besides, I hate all this super-sensitiveness. I feel I want to stamp on it."

You would feel that way. You would. How abominable, Barbara Nancy thought and was silent, all her thoughts whirling and confused so that she could not speak.

Walking side by side, they eventually joined the crowd which had assembled to watch the greasy-pole contest. Already the Fisherman was out, beaten by Brock Doddington. "Your brother couldn't stop a-laughin'," someone in the crowd informed Barbara Nancy. The Fisherman, Canada forgotten, Moll Mainwaring forgotten, was laughing still, while Brock, serious and flushed with pride, stood by.

"Confidence! That is the main thing. That is what is wanted," Seth was saying. He too was proud.

Tamlin walked round the greasy pole and walked round it again.

"I'll challenge you," Brock said on an impulse, coming up to him.

At once, though it was not necessary to do so yet, Tamlin began to take off his coat.

In expectation of the new contest the crowd formed again. Unwilling but fascinated, Barbara Nancy stayed on with the rest.

For all the difference in their ages the two young men were not ill-matched. Brock was more expert; Tamlin was taller and longer in the arm. Brock played carefully at first, then, from excitement or nervous tension, appeared determined to finish quickly. But Tamlin was not easily hurried or put out—unwillingly again Barbara Nancy was obliged to concede so much. Through it all he kept a cool, faintly smiling and infinitely exasperating air. Before long it was

plain that Brock rather than Tamlin was being worn down. Seth noted the first signs of distress on his son's part and grew anxious. What's the lad thinking of? he wondered and shifted uneasily on his feet. Brock's afraid, Barbara Nancy felt in the same moment. He is afraid, not of being hurt, but of being beaten.

From this point the general excitement and the tension grew. "Finish it, Yorkshire. Finish it!" someone in the crowd cried. Tamlin nodded. "Right."

Brock appeared to crumple then. He was struck shrewdly, he slipped, lost balance, hung suspended by his feet for a second, then fell. He was seen, alone and defeated, for a moment, then making his way unhappily, his father following him, out of the crowd. Tamlin, wanting no applause and no congratulations and receiving none, which was not surprising, Barbara Nancy thought, since he was regarded in Alne as a foreigner from another county, had slipped on his coat and was gone.

Brock's discomfiture spread a cloud over Barbara Nancy's day. It was not merely that she was accustomed to share his triumphs and disappointments. Something more abstract was involved. She had begun to think about people, as it were to discover people. Were they, she was increasingly driven to ask, the easy, kindly creatures they appeared to be on the surface, or were they what they showed themselves to be sometimes, hostile and competitive and easily at odds? Tamlin and Brock, for no reason that she could see, had wished to humiliate each other: Tamlin had been provocative, then contemptuous, Brock had been challenging and defiant. She tried to comfort herself: Furnesses were more equable, Furnesses did not make gestures, did not show off, were never challenging or at odds. Once more she was conscious of misgiving. There was rivalry; there was even a certain hostility in these days between the Fisherman and the Philosopher. Neither rivalry nor hostility was expressed in

words, but in silences; in an increasing distance, it seemed, between them. But this, perhaps, was easily understood since both brothers were competitors for Moll Mainwaring's favours. But things were not much better between the Fisherman and their father. Their father, who had seldom been angry or ill-humoured, seemed permanently out of humour now. Almost it was as though he blamed himself that he could do no more for them, as though the Fisherman, because of his own personal disappointment, had hardened against their father and against them all. When they were younger, rivalries and problems had both been absent. Now, by comparison, nothing was straightforward or plain, as if there were no room for all the conflicting desires and feelings that had grown up in them of late; as though, unsuspected, the world pulled at them, as though for the Furnesses already the family and the village were too small. Not to stand still, ever; never to go back, Barbara Nancy thought. That, no doubt, was what the Fisherman had in mind, what they all had in mind. But here again, nostalgia gripped her for a second. What was new always appeared dangerous; only yesterday was golden, and to-morrow, of course, never came.

Absorbed in her own thoughts she walked on and came face to face with Tamlin.

"Tea?" he said, and laughed at her.

She did not speak at once.

"Don't you take tea?"

He brought tea. "I know," he said, looking at her, then at once looking away, "in order to have pleased you, and everyone else, I should have allowed young Doddington to win."

She did not answer for a moment. It was not easy to put her objection into words. She spoke haltingly then. "You were much too serious, both of you. It was like something personal between you, like some sort of rivalry."

"Oh, surely"—Tamlin stopped short then and stirred his

tea. He looked at her, half-smiling. "What are you doing? —taking care of him?"

"I wasn't really thinking of Brock when we met," she said.

"Well, it's over now." Tamlin spoke cheerfully.

"Where Brock's feelings are concerned nothing is ever over for him," she declared.

"The young man would not have thanked me, you know, if I had allowed him to win," after a moment Tamlin said.

Barbara Nancy agreed, though she was frowning still. "But, somehow, I don't like it," she said. "And it would have been so good for him if he had beaten you."

Tamlin laughed at her. "You like to be kind, don't you? Quite incorrigibly kind? I'll tell you something. No, on second thoughts, I'll leave you to guess. You are good at guessing." Both teacups in his hand he went off then.

In some confusion of mind she watched him go. I can't take care of everyone. It's sentimental to be kind. That is what Tamlin wished to say.

She walked slowly away in the direction of the river. Until to-day Tamlin has not laughed at me quite so much, she thought. I like him, she told herself suddenly. I don't understand him. She flushed warmly then. I like a great many people, she told herself. But her liking for Tamlin remained, something unmistakable and small and separate in her mind.

Where the river broadened towards the millstream a wind touched her face, the thick ranks of flowers set along the banks bent and swayed; she could hear the deep flow of the water and the small dry stir of the dragon-flies' wings as they stitched and darted over the yellow cups of the waterlilies. She went on a little way once more; then, in a momentary panic, almost turned back. For Bridget Tufton, stooping over the flowers and snatching at them with her long fingers, was coming towards her and talking to herself as she came.

She stood on one side to allow Bridget to pass.

Bridget went on, then turned and, looking at her, stood still. "When you are alone at first you're no more than quiet. Then, suddenly, there's loneliness," she said, "startling you, like your own foot on the stair."

She held the flowers in her two hands and looked across them at Barbara Nancy. Her head bowed, her face shadowed and darkened by all the flowers, she went on again.

Barbara Nancy, more pitiful than alarmed by this time, waited until she was out of sight. Once more, in an instant, she was made aware of the unexplained strangeness that always seemed to her of late to lie just under the surface of things. I know nothing, her mind went; even if I knew all that I might know, should I ever understand?

It was with relief a little later that she came upon George Fairey. He had signalled to her from the other side of the Well Meadow; he was beside her now, a halter over his arm. He had come to-night, as he came every night, to bring in the timber horses. Clumsy but gentle creatures, they followed him now.

By the gate leading to the road George paused. "Bill Garlick'll whistle my horses after me," he said. He was silent then and a long while fumbling with the latch. "I got to go some time, that's how I look at it," he said again. He went on: "I see you nailed by Bridget. Nobody wants much of her, I reckon, not like she is now, not like she ever was so fur as I can see. That's why I waved to you."

"I don't mind her," Barbara Nancy said. "At least I don't think I mind."

George looked at her. His small eyes were steady under the thick reddish brows. There was down very fine and fair like thistledown over his brown cheeks, a red stubble of bristles on his chin. His hair, so bleached and dried by the sun as to show neither yellow nor bronze, was curled as tightly as a negro's hair on his massive head. He moved

slowly with a heavy suppleness like one of his own cart horses. When he spoke you could hear his thoughts ticking over almost like a clock. He spoke slowly now, with a kind of roar for emphasis, waving his hand in the direction of the timber yard: "She's not properly there."

"What does that mean, really?" Barbara Nancy asked, frowning and walking on. "Does it mean that something else is there?"

Half-amused, George looked at her. "It means she's touched," he said.

"I know," Barbara Nancy said. Her words, and the incomprehensible thought behind her words, trailed away.

They came on without speaking, the horses going before them soberly. The May dusk was ending; the trees that bordered the road were heavy and still as though in a green sleep, the upreared pillars of cloud behind the elm trees showed each a faintly discernible skin of shadow.

George swung the halter slowly in one hand and spoke of his own affairs.

"Folks say to me, 'Why do you want to leave your mother?' And I don't rightly know why. But I know I could stay on here till I'm dead and buried and earn my fourteen shillin' a week and never have much more than a pair o' Sunday boots to call me own. And I don't know as I wouldn't ha' stayed on if I hadn't thought o' summat different. And I don't know how I did come to change me mind, not rightly I don't know. But I remember how it all started. I was coming along with young Bill Gorrall, in the same way that you and me are coming along now, and I was dead sleepy as a bumblebee, with no more in my head than a bumblebee, not so much, when young Bill starts up. 'Over the hills and far away,' he sings, and whistles then, for he don't know no more of the words than that. 'Over the hills,' he sings, 'over the hills, and far away.' And there was the hills in front of us, blue like they are now"—George waved the halter—"and what must I

do but think all of a sudden to meself: 'You've never been over them hills, George Fairey. You've never stirred out of this place. And you'd better hurry. Or you'll never stir.' It's all come from that, gradual," George said. "It's queer how summat different'll come into your mind after years of the same thing."

"I know," Barbara Nancy said yet again. "I know." She nodded vaguely.

They were in the timber yard once more. It was dead quiet there. The horses, solemn as churchwardens, grouped themselves about the water trough; the usual green woodpecker dipped heavily away from its familiar ash tree. Fool's parsley was a foam of white about the scorched walls and burned floors of the Tuftons' old house, and from all the rain that had fallen that month you could hear many feet underground the deep welling sound of the spring.

"Co-oop, co-oop," George called to his horses from the open stable door. Lifting their heads and shaking the drops of water from their mouths, the horses came, each one stooping its head under the low lintel and trooping in. George latched the door after them, hung his halter over a nail and came back with her.

On their way to the water meadows Bridget passed them a second time. Her hands were empty; her flowers, or flowers like them, as if she had thrown them down only a moment before, floated on the water, or washed gently to and fro between the lily leaves.

George turned his head to look after her. "In and out of that old house of hers she goes."

But Barbara Nancy began to hurry, from George, from Bridget and from her own thoughts. "Oh, hurry, George," she said. "Do you never hurry?"

People were dancing in the far meadow: gay petticoats swinging out like bells, like crinolines, coat tails flying, small children running here, running there, until all that

part of the field was like a small garden of flowers lightly swaying together. And the sound of the music coming and going again over the field was like a wind stirring the flowers.

She described a small impatient gesture of one hand. She broke into a run. "Goodbye, goodbye," she called.

"I don't never hurry unless I got to," George called after her. As usual, where speech was concerned he arrived a little late. He waved. He dismissed her too.

"I love, I simply love," she declared not ten minutes afterwards, dancing on her toes in her place opposite Brock Doddington in the long row of dancers, "I simply love dancing Sir Roger de Coverley." She was happy by this time; she was quite unaware of herself. Brock watched her, a small contented smile on his face.

"Let's talk afterwards," he said.

They talked, Barbara Nancy sitting down, Brock standing beside her, his hand resting a trifle possessively upon her chair. Like a wedding photograph, she suggested. Immediately Brock took away his hand.

"How long is Tamlin staying?" he inquired.

"I don't know. He doesn't know. Does it matter?"

"He always seems to take a certain amount of pleasure in making me look a fool," Brock said.

She answered at random again, though more seriously. "No one could call him nice. I think he could be kind."

"They are such unimpressive qualities—niceness, kindness." Brock stirred impatiently.

"What do you wish to be then?" She stared at him.

"I am being too serious for you, and too involved, I expect," he said.

"When Plompartay was little he was often bilious." Barbara Nancy swung a hand lightly. "And then he would always say, 'I am going to be serious.'"

"We are not in the mood for each other, it seems," after a moment Brock said. He turned stiff and uncommunicative then.

They parted soon after that, Barbara Nancy sighing a little to herself: Why must everyone, including myself, be so temperamental? Why does Brock Doddington care so much for what other people think?

I hate, I hate, she told herself afterwards—she was dancing happily with Tamlin—there are times when I hate to remember other people; there are times when I can bear to think only of myself.

The music stopped. For a moment they stood still. The sky was turquoise flecked with faint grey; the moon was thin and pale, the trees dark; there was dusk and dew underfoot, and deep still shadows.

One ought to have enough sympathy for everyone, for everything, she told herself again. But then one would have nothing left for oneself. She sighed once more. She spoke inconsequently. "I am glad it is dusk."

Tamlin laughed. "That is not what you were thinking."

"No," she said guiltily.

"Let's walk." Tamlin turned away. He looked over his shoulder. "Are you ever self-conscious?"

She thought for a moment. "I don't know. Why?"

"And do you always ask why?"

"Almost always. But no one answers me."

"It is almost a Furness habit," Tamlin said.

"Really I was thinking of other people just then, of people generally."

Tamlin went on skirting the deep grass, Barbara Nancy following him. "There ought to be more equality of experience between people, there ought to be equality in love between two people also. Or love won't last, even romantic love. That is what I was thinking," he said.

"But do you want love to last?" Barbara Nancy spoke in matter-of-fact tones.

"I was being theoretical," Tamlin said. "I am much too egotistical to enjoy falling in love. But we are being much too solemn."

"Brock became very solemn also," she said.

"Is he ever anything but solemn?" she believed, but could not be certain, she heard Tamlin say.

They left the Well Meadow and came to where the river flowed, as it were privately, in its own wilderness of elder bushes and birch trees

The path, which was no wider than a hare's track, wound in and out of elder and hazel thickets now. Tamlin held a branch aside so that Barbara Nancy might pass. She stooped, then froze. Not twenty yards from them the Fisherman and Moll Mainwaring lay, closely clasped and still.

Together, not looking at each other, they turned and made their way once more to the Well Meadow. Once there, Tamlin looked and spoke with an air of seriousness: "They are in love, you know."

"Not Moll Mainwaring," Barbara Nancy said. She felt resentful and queerly shaken and confused.

Margaret clung to her husband's arm in silence. Time always slipped by like this, stealthily: the day that one longed for, or the day that one dreaded, came suddenly always. Quite soon the Fisherman would be gone, and for a little while there would be a dead waste of time without him, as if every day as it came were an empty shell. Now that Edward and she were on their way home, the depression against which she had struggled for weeks was upon her, was all the stronger, it seemed, for having been so long denied.

He detested engineering, the Fisherman had declared, coming in passionately one evening and throwing down his cap. "I gave my word you would serve out your apprenticeship," his father said. "You gave your word, you didn't give mine," the Fisherman had answered. "Settle it. Choose for yourself what you'll do," his father had said.

The Fisherman had started up, his long shadow wavering, then steady on the lamplit wall, as if the shadow were himself, she had thought. "I will, I'll find out now," he had said, standing still, his shadow standing still with him. He had turned and gone out then.

"I'll go to Canada. I'll farm. I'll not stay here," he had said when he came back. There had been silence between them all for a moment. Even later on nothing was said. Days afterwards the map was brought out, a new map. All North America was laid out there, the provinces large and coloured as she had never seen provinces coloured before. His father and the Fisherman had grown reconciled over the map. They had traced the great rivers with finger and pencil, and forgotten their differences; they had named the great lakes and grown quietly excited and absorbed. This is Superior, they had said, this is Michigan, this Erie. This is prairie land, they had told each other; this is forest; here are the whale and the salmon fisheries; there's steel here; there's coal and gold. "This," Edward had moved his pencil suddenly, "is the North-west Passage."

"Old Frobisher," the Fisherman said—"was it Frobisher who sat in an open boat and told his men, or was it only just one boy, 'We are as near God by sea as by land'?" The Fisherman laid a hand on the frozen North. "Those are the wastelands. Could one go trapping there? Why couldn't a man live there?"

"So much cold and no sun can't be borne for long," Edward said. "One's mind, or so they say, breaks under the strain."

"If you went to live there of your own free will why should you break under the strain?" the Fisherman said, looking obstinate all at once.

"You could try it," Edward said, tolerant as Edward invariably was, and amused too. He had pointed again with his pencil—they had moved from one ocean to another, to the other side of the world. "This is the peak in Darien

where stout Pizarro, or whatever he was called, looked down on the Pacific. You remember?"

"It was another Spaniard; it was Balboa, I do know that," the Fisherman said. "A book I have on Drake—the book I had for winning the half-mile—says so."

"It's the Pacific anyway," his father said. Looking at Canada and the two oceans, father and son had been silent then.

They were alike in this, Margaret had thought, that in them thought and imagination went out further and further always. Because the Fisherman was discontented and restless he must go thousands of miles away; because he did not care for engineering he would seek nothing in England, nothing nearer home. Like some hero in one of his own prize books he would choose to go oversea, to go where for him at least everything was unknown. "I'll find out," the Fisherman and his father always seemed to say.

The two of them had looked at her in that moment as if they would read her thoughts. Almost they seemed to plead with her: Don't confuse us, or weaken us, don't spoil what is in our minds.

She had bent her head over her darning once more. As if to spare her and himself Edward had folded up the map. "There it is," he had said. He had handed it to the Fisherman.

And now the departure which she had dreaded, which she had thrust so constantly from her mind, was all but here.

She spoke bitterly out of her thoughts. "Be prepared. And the best we can do for our sons is to send them away."

"They have always gone from this country. And from other countries," Edward said, an unaccustomed note of heaviness in his voice.

"The impulse to go is a kind of fever in them at the moment," she said. "Why? What is wrong with this country? With Europe?"

"You would not have us keep them here," Edward said, "doing what we do, knowing no other life, when they wish to go?"

"They are not old enough to know what they wish," she said bitterly again.

"What would you have us do for John then? I can buy him a sizable piece of land in Canada, not a yard here," looking at her, Edward said.

She did not speak for a moment, too pointed a question trembling on her lips. Stoic-like, Edward would always choose to part from his children at the height of his love and pride in them. While I would have them with me always, she thought.

"Need they go so many hundreds of miles?" Her hand tightened on her husband's arm. "I must keep Henry," she said. "I must."

"Henry will make his own life, as we did, as the others will do," Edward said, quiet again.

That was Edward's creed, freedom, freedom. "We should have had only the one child," she said. She took away her arm.

"Which one?" Edward said.

She was instantly aware of his anger and of the hurt behind it. This separation is no easier for him than it is for me, she thought. "I am sorry, forgive me," she said.

Looking at her, not smiling at all, "Sorry for what?" he asked.

"Sorry for everything, perhaps," she answered, reckless again, for it was not like Edward to refuse forgiveness.

"Then I should be sorry too," he said, "sorry that I have not more money to give you and the children. I should apologize to you for that."

She spoke almost humbly again. "Forgive me. Don't remember what I said."

Edward gave no sign of having heard. Against so much suppressed bitterness of feeling in his wife he always found it

difficult to speak. His own resentment, perhaps his own bitterness, silenced him. Passion blinded everything, he thought now. With passion one spoke, one reasoned in the dark. Did a woman ever forgive a man for being poor? Poverty tied a man down, poverty brought its own frustrations, its own sorrows. At the time he had never questioned old Edwin's will. Though in these days he was reminded of it at every turn, he did not question it even now. For him their two elder sons were men; for Margaret at bottom they would be children always. She would never at heart make them free of her love and of themselves. She asked for comfort now; her resentment, her silence even, were ways of demanding comfort. There was little comfort he could give. John would go away; Robert might follow; they would write for a time; they would marry; they might never come back. Imperceptibly his own resentment gave way to a greater heaviness. He reproached himself: I might have done so much more for them had I cared more for money, had I cared in time. Strange, he thought, not bitterly at all, strange that it should be a reproach to a man that he should have four children. What a bright new world it had become in which only the barren looked like being blessed!

Since comfort was plainly necessary he tried to comfort Margaret and himself.

"These countries—Canada, Australia, New Zealand," he said, "are the best things we in this country have ever done. Whatever happens to the world, and a great deal may happen, our name can't altogether perish while they live. In that sense the Fisherman won't be going so far from us, I feel."

Margaret looked at him in astonishment for a moment. It was like Edward to offer just this impersonal brand of comfort. And yet in an odd way there was consolation here even for her. Something outside oneself, greater than oneself—was this, her mind pondered for a moment, the secret of Edward's peace? Surely he was the least possessive

man in the world. And I must be possessive always, she thought, rebellious always. Now, very swiftly, she reproached herself. Because I am a woman I find it difficult to look at the world. Even Mrs. Fairey—why do I say "even"?—is wiser than I am. Only this morning she said to me: "It's the love your children have for you that matters, it's not the keeping 'em close at hand."

She touched her husband's arm. She spoke in a sudden warm rush of feeling. "Our children shall do as they wish with their lives, always, I promise," she said.

No longer any difference between them, they came on together in silence.

Presently they looked back. The bright-coloured dresses of the women were like flags moving in and out of the dusk. Already Seth and George Fairey were setting a light to all the lanterns that hung, like clusters of orange fruit, in the branches; now, it seemed to Margaret, the lights burned tranquilly like glow-worms, now the dark seemed to stand back a little way, hooded and cloaked, watching beside the trees.

Tamlin and Barbara Nancy were dancing together. "What is the meaning of Empire Day," they sang and capered lightheartedly, "why do the cannons ro-roar?"

PART V

A DARKENING SHADOW

CHAPTER ONE

GRAND TOUR

It was the Philosopher who gave it a name. Standing in Barbara Nancy's sick-room and laughing at her, "Ha, the Grand Tour," he said. And Barbara Nancy, flushed from the long bouts of coughing of pneumonia, though she felt unable to make any reply, had understood the hint of irony in her brother's voice. For the Philosopher, apprenticed to a naval engineer, earned little, and consumed more than he earned; and though he in his turn dreamed of foreign parts and distant seas, he could go no further than Liverpool or Brixham in search of them, and then only at holiday times, and holidays with him were a matter more of hours than of days. A grand tour extending over weeks of the sort planned for Barbara Nancy, even though it embraced England and Wales only, was clearly not for him.

"What's it like?" In order to hide her concern for the Philosopher, Barbara Nancy leaned solicitously over Henry, who had just swallowed the first dose of her new bottle of medicine.

He did not think so much of this bottle, Plom said, and wiped his mouth. But the last was fine, he declared. "I cleaned my Wellingtons with some, and I gave some to the guinea-pigs—it curled them up a bit—and I swapped a double dose to Bill Mainwaring for a bag of kali. I said it would cure his stammer, and so it might have done, but he s-pat it out, the s-silly d-duffer," Plom said, and swaggering a little in a new manly fashion he went away.

"Young Henry must have the stomach of a leather-jacket," the Philosopher remarked. And, lifting two fingers in a faintly precious salute, he also, for the two were seldom apart, made off after Plompartay.

Left to herself, Barbara Nancy gave way to the feeling of nostalgia that never fails, sooner or later, to visit sick-beds. She wished ardently to be out of doors. "Being ill isn't so bad as you think," she said, and spoke out loud. "Getting better is worse."

Her mother came into the room. She sat down on the chair beside Barbara Nancy, then drew it nearer the bed.

"You've had your medicine?"

"Plom had it," Barbara Nancy said.

"But I suppose you are better?" Margaret frowned. "And the guinea-pigs are not at all well," she said absently in the next breath. She put up both hands and tucked away a loose strand of hair.

"All your lovely hair is striped with white now," Barbara Nancy remarked irrelevantly.

"A letter from Tamlin by this afternoon's post," her mother said. "He has offered to lend your father half his own money for Henry's education. But Henry does not know what he wishes to do. And of course we could not take so much from Tamlin. I don't feel we could."

"Would you allow Tamlin to help if you liked him better?" Barbara Nancy asked. She tried not to sound pointed. She wished to appear no more than inquiring and polite.

"I don't dislike him. You think I am full of dislikes," her mother said.

"It doesn't matter." Barbara Nancy's hands fell in a tired fashion upon the sheet.

Her mother spoke calmly then. "I was going to ask you—though perhaps this is not a good time to do so since you appear so tired—do you think when you have been to

my sister Lydia in Gloucestershire, and Sarah in Wales, you will feel well enough to go on to Yorkshire?"

"I should like to go. After all," Barbara Nancy rallied and looked at her mother and spoke directly, "I belong to the Furnesses too."

"I thought you belonged to my side of the family," not quite laughing, her mother said.

"Do you mean you don't wish me to go?"

Margaret leaned over and kissed her swiftly. "Go if you like. Of course." Straightening then, the empty medicine-glass still in her hand, she left the room.

The Godfreys' house—it was to the Godfreys' house that she had gone first—was just as Barbara Nancy had imagined it would be: small, white, wind-swept, looking out on the green down, and the chapel, built of yellowish-grey stone, was as stark and forbidding as she had known it would be. Why did my grandfather think of building this house and only this house? She had walked round it. The sun slid off the dark polished surfaces of the bay leaves, was star-pointed and winking on the brass knocker, made pools of gold in the shining windows hung with the plain blue curtains. Plain blue—Barbara Nancy had come round to the other side of the house—and the Misses Warren who lived almost next door, considered blue curtains so advanced. But then everything, she had reflected, about my Aunt Lydia and my Uncle Philip Godfrey must appear advanced to the Misses Warren —my Aunt Lydia's long cloaks, for instance, fastened with hand-wrought silver brooches; her large flat hats like those the Wife of Bath wears in the illustrations to the *Canterbury Tales;* or my Uncle Philip himself in his sober blacks, his startlingly white shining collars. My Aunt Lydia is, of course, very passionately on the side of reform. Almost any kind of reform. She disapproves of so many things. High heels are bad for child-bearing, sugar is poison, open-work stockings are provocative,—though when I asked of

what my Aunt Lydia merely pursed her lips. My Uncle eats special sticky bread; there are always large-sized books and plain-looking papers strewn about the house. And the stairs are uncarpeted, and the bathroom is Spartan cold.

Altogether—she had continued her summing up—it is pleasant enough being here, but long and sleepy like a long summer's day, when no one comes to the house, and the tits sway on the rose branches, and the petals fall, and you wish for something different, for something ruder—even, perhaps, for something masculine. For my Uncle Philip Godfrey is scarcely masculine; he is merely sacerdotal. And you walk about as I am walking about now, touching this and that, almost speaking your thoughts aloud. And still nothing happens; the clouds move over, no one comes, a leaf falls, there's a hum of bees and it is teatime, and no longer so quiet, and the day goes. The next day, unless it is wet, is exactly the same, and three weeks seem smooth and endless, like a long sleep. And many women, I suppose, live and die like this. I feel separate here, separate from my Aunt Lydia, from my Uncle Philip Godfrey; they stay outside my mind. I feel separate almost from myself. This last amounts to no more than a kind of homesickness, my aunt would say, for her two feet are very flat upon the ground. My Uncle Philip would not dare to be so certain. Occasionally, he attempts, rather heavily, to take flight. "Your aunt," he said to me one day with a dry look, "has somewhat opinionated tastes." My aunt was wearing a tomato-coloured dress that day. Because of it she declared she felt positive. Again, when the elder Miss Warren sent the maid round with the evening newspaper containing the news of an assassination somewhere in Servia, my aunt said at once: "Oh, the poor things. But there are far too many archdukes and archduchesses."

She had continued to advance over the scrubbed white flagstones between the borders of blue and white campanulas. Quite suddenly, on rounding the corner, she had come upon

her Uncle Philip seated in a green deck-chair beside his wife and fast asleep. One long black-clad arm hung above a fallen volume. Philip Godfrey's face, no doubt from the heat, was paler than usual, his mouth was open, and a fly was hovering between his mouth and his nose. Barbara Nancy had paused. As she did so her Aunt Lydia had got up from her chair and with a mouselike whisk of her long skirts laid a white handkerchief over her husband's face.

"A friend of mine," she remarked, looking up and holding her chin high so that she might the more easily re-thread her needle, "declared to me once that she could never believe in a divinity that created flies."

A pear had fallen with a thump from one of the pear trees and rolled into the path. "Oh, and speaking of flies reminds me," Aunt Lydia said, "Peach Warren's people are all in India, you know, dear. They appear to be very near your Uncle Edmund and his wife. In fact, I think the two families have met." She looked up once more. "Peach is about your age. You should see more of her, dear."

"She talks of nothing but her family and her kittens," Barbara Nancy had said.

Her aunt had continued to darn the corner of the white damask tablecloth. "Your Uncle Edmund is doing very well in his work, tell your mother so," she said again after a moment. "I don't think your mother and he correspond." She had looked up. "Really he is the only one among us all who has ever been heard of in the world. Or, for that matter, is ever likely to be. When we were all young we were convinced your mother would prove the most remarkable one among us. But, you know, dear, temperament is not necessarily talent. How often one discovers that! When your mother married, I said to Philip: 'Strictly between ourselves, is it a good thing,' I said, 'to be different and feel oneself different from ordinary people as Margaret does, and yet be compelled to do quite ordinary things and lead what after all is a very ordinary life?' By that I meant, of

course, children, dear, and a home, and all the domestic side of existence. That would be one of Margaret's greatest difficulties, I always said."

Barbara Nancy had smarted in silence for a moment. My Aunt Lydia puts her finger on all the tender spots. Another pear had fallen from the tree, the white handkerchief on Philip Godfrey's face had lifted in a small burst of wind and lay upon the stones. Barbara Nancy was about to stoop. "Leave it, dear," Aunt Lydia whispered loudly. "The fly has gone away."

Presently—Barbara Nancy's vexations never lasted—the long garden had appeared very pleasant to her once more with its stiff trim flowers—pink daisies, red-hot pokers, gladioli—in the long border beside the path, with the wide clock-faces of the sunflowers burning yellow and black against the grey wall—and her Uncle Philip snoring softly but audibly in his chair.

Her Aunt Lydia spoke again. She had, Barbara Nancy had been aware all at once, a very clear voice. "Of course, dear, I always feel you are very grown-up in some ways and rather childish in others." After that she had heard her aunt say: "Of course Peach is not at all clever. Peach is only a good gentle girl."

She had felt almost no resentment at first, then suddenly a great deal. My Aunt Lydia is a sort of earwig, she had thought. She is one of those people who wait a long while, then nip you while you are asleep. She had got up from her chair and gone to the edge of the garden, where the cracks in the red earth were deep from all the heat of the long summer. If I were in love with ideas, if I were no more than an idea myself, I might be happy with my Aunt Lydia, she had told herself.

As a sign that he was awake, Philip Godfrey smoothed his hair. He had spoken apologetically, as if he had been awake and listening for a little while. "It has been very dull for Barbara Nancy here, I am afraid," he said.

"But I have been happy, quite happy, really," his niece had protested. "I should be quite happy anywhere," casting one look at her Aunt Lydia, she had said.

From the Godfreys' house she had gone on to the Manifolds in North Wales—her eyes shut, leaning back in the compartment while the train roared through a long tunnel, she went over it all again.

Mr. Manifold's motor-car, so the station people had courteously described it on the day of her arrival at Guest, bounded over the narrow stony road. Like Noah and his Ark, it was, John Christian said proudly, a pioneer and the first of its kind. Seated on high before a very large steering-wheel he drove with an air of abandon. A small cloud of dust followed; children stared; dogs, not daring to venture a crossing, ran round in circles, barking as they ran. Every circumstance had combined to produce in her mind not only a feeling of exhilaration, but also a faint conscious superiority. In order to enjoy herself she sat back. The wind was like a cold rubber cushion pressing upon her; through the wind, as if she were looking through a wave, she could see her Aunt Sarah's slender, upright back in the shantung dust coat and the knot of smoothly-coiled white hair. Even on fishing expeditions her Aunt Sarah wore ear-rings, tiny rose clusters of deep red garnets that had once been buttons; even on fishing expeditions she contrived to appear both elegant and, what was even more surprising, gay. "I detest tweeds," she had declared only a few minutes before setting out. "They are as bristly as if they were woven out of old men's beards." She had laughed, and looked at herself in the long mirror and pinned a small silver pin into her wine-coloured toque with the white veil.

"You look like a bride. Do you always wear white veils?" Barbara Nancy had asked, for there was something about both the Manifolds which made her quite unafraid to ask questions.

This was the day they had planned for weeks; until now it had always rained, or misted, or thundered. Or there had been trouble with the men at John Christian's slate quarry, and instead of Wednesday outings there had been for John Christian, if not for her aunt and herself, discussions and deputations between John Christian on the one hand and the men's representatives on the other. Yesterday, since everyone, or so it seemed to Barbara Nancy, had become a little tired of quarrelling, the dispute had been settled; to-day the familiar muffled sounds were to be heard from the slate quarry, and John Christian no longer wore a frown and talked gloomily of that unholy trinity of smaller profits, higher taxation and increased wages. All these matters of profits and wages would, Barbara Nancy had realized, appear in a very different light to her Uncle Philip Godfrey, who had a signed photograph of Edward Carpenter in his small study and who went to sleep after chapel on Sundays with a copy of a large blue volume entitled *Industrial Democracy* at his feet.

However that might be, the weather had cleared, the clouds made melting shadow patterns over the hills and the long green tongues of valleys; the green velvet countryside smelled of leaves and bracken and rain. Everywhere was the sound and ripple of water flowing, from the deep wayside ditches, making music between the flowers and the bending grasses, from small noisy cascades and shining smooth torrents, speeding like ribbons of quicksilver, some narrow, some wide, down the rough face of the hills.

They had reached the Pass. In the distance it had seemed no more than a blue shadow between the hills; now that they had arrived it seemed indeed like any other place, except that here the mountains, like frozen giants, stepped down and stood, close and silent, about them. Almost it seemed to Barbara Nancy that one could touch them simply by putting out a hand. Once more there was water everywhere:

clear brown-amber water, crusted over with curled cakes of brownish foam.

John Christian, looking very long and too lean in knickerbockers and a Norfolk jacket, was taking out the fishing-rods and the rugs and the baskets. Sarah was standing on a small footbridge and looking down at the brown water.

"I am always thankful," John Christian said, tumbling out still another basket, "that your aunt is not one of those active women who must always be doing, or offering to do, something."

From the bridge Sarah said, without looking round: "When John Christian talks in that fashion he has your Aunt Lydia in mind."

John Christian paused and looked up. "Lydia said that dear Sarah would be so much happier if I worked."

"I have always been happy. John Christian, you have a fish-hook in your collar," his wife said, looking over her shoulder now and smiling at him.

"I like Aunt Lydia, really," Barbara Nancy had said, and blushed for some reason, and removed the fish-hook.

"So do we," both the Manifolds had protested instantly.

Sarah crossed over the bridge that led to a wider curve of the river and a flat green field. Barbara Nancy followed. Even at this point—here she had looked over her shoulder—the mountains appeared just as close.

"I should miss them if they did not come and look over my shoulder," John Christian said.

"Don't allow him to read your thoughts," her Aunt Sarah advised.

"There is nothing in my thoughts," Barbara Nancy protested.

"She means she is happy," John Christian declared.

It was true, now that the fishing expedition was behind her, now that it had become only a part of her stay with the Manifolds—Barbara Nancy realized it now—she had been quite mindlessly content all that day.

The Manifolds' house—she could see it in her mind's eye clearly again—appeared to grow out of the hillside. It was white, it had a low, steeply-sloping roof of blue tiles, and three white chimneys. The garden, which had once been part of the hill, was fed by several mountain streams, so that whenever it rained, and it rained almost every day, the house was full of the sound of water flowing and running away. The drawing-room had a small lattice window to one side, across which a branch of a Dorothy Perkins rose trailed. Upstairs, in the best bedroom, was the bed with crimson silk hangings in which, it was believed, the poet Chatterton had died; the bathroom plug leaked a little and John Christian could be heard swearing over it in the evening now and then, and the water-closet chain was very difficult to pull.

These and other equally disjointed recollections filled Barbara Nancy's mind. She stirred, then sat back once more in the carriage; she gave herself up once more to her thoughts. The compartment was empty; the train sped on, carrying her further towards the Furnesses, further towards the north.

In talking to her sometimes her Aunt Sarah would often laugh, as though what she said were only a small and unimportant part of what was in her mind.

"Your mother," she said on one occasion, "was such an odd, stormy, clever little girl. So passionate sometimes. At other times so cold and queerly self-possessed. No one could help but take note of her when she was small."

Her aunt talked a great deal, as was only to be expected, of John Christian. "We eloped," she said. "My family and his family thought it was very improper, as of course it was."

Barbara Nancy had reflected on all that she had heard, or imagined, of elopements. "Did you have a toothbrush?" she inquired finally.

"I had only John Christian," her Aunt Sarah said. It was here that she had laughed.

"Does he ever catch fish?" Barbara Nancy had asked on another occasion.

"Sometimes. And the slate quarry only just pays," her aunt said.

She puts things together that are related but that don't quite match, and so do I, Barbara Nancy had thought. In the silence that followed, a silence broken only by the faint prick of her aunt's needle in and out of her embroidery frame, she had been driven to consider both her Aunt Sarah and her Uncle John Christian. There was indeed, she saw clearly again, a faint unreality about them. Perhaps it was no more than an excess of good fortune, she thought. Was there anything that they wanted? She wondered now. She could think of nothing unless it was to be young again. And that, she was sure, was something for which they would not ask.

In the midst of one of the silences between them her Aunt Sarah had said thoughtfully, while stroking a pricked finger: "Personal happiness cuts out a great many things, you know, a great many impersonal things. You see"—she had looked up—"John Christian and I do not care very much for the state of the world, or for politics, as Lydia and Philip do. John Christian did care once, a long time ago. He does not care now and sometimes Philip and Lydia make us feel very guilty. And Francis, our eldest son, has become as serious as his father and I have become frivolous. He has done so in order to punish us, we say."

"John James appears very earnest also," Barbara Nancy had said. She remembered John James.

"He is just a little wax tablet at present for John Christian to write upon," Sarah had said, and laughed, and Barbara Nancy had nodded twice appreciatively.

Presently her aunt had said again: "We lived in John Christian's grandfather's house when we were married first. It is let at present, and what has not been sold of the land is let also. The house was too large for us. It had, I always

thought, a foggy, dead, museum air. It was so full of ancestors it was like a family vault. The children and their father always called it the Family Vault. Since I was a stranger to the house I always tried to be more polite. Another reason I had for disliking it was that I felt I had to walk so far before I could sit down and to look such a long way before I could see anything, even the time on the face of a clock. And your uncle was not a good farmer. He was very enthusiastic at first, and that, of course, was the wrong thing to be. He had ideas about the land, too, and farmers have no ideas. The real farmers say so little, and know so much, and hide it all. They are really three-parts under the ground, I think, like turnips. Something wooden about them, and pithy as well, like turnips. The land is just the land to them, and everything they do for you they do for profit, but as though they were doing you a favour. So that in order to please them, you must always be grateful, and pay fifteen to twenty per cent in addition. And John Christian was no good at being grateful, or at bargaining, or at paying fifteen to twenty per cent. So," Sarah had said, and paused, and carried out one or two difficult stitches, then gone on: "we let the house while the three boys were small, and we built this house and bought the slate quarry. It means nothing to us now that we are of so much less consequence than we were."

"But why a slate quarry?" Barbara Nancy had asked after a second.

"It was here," her aunt said, and looked surprised. "And John Christian said he must do something to earn a living, or the Godfreys would not like it. They are his conscience, he says. For that reason we do not see very much of them. Nobody wants to be visited by their consciences too often, John Christian says. He is really a little ridiculous sometimes," Sarah had said, laughing once more, "and so am I."

John Christian had come into the room at that moment.

He took a cup of coffee from his wife, added a thimbleful of brandy, and sat down.

"I have decided," he said, "that our niece shall marry John James or even Francis."

"I should love it," Sarah said tranquilly. "Either John James or Francis."

"How could one marry anyone so polite as John James? And my cousin Francis never relaxes," Barbara Nancy had said.

John Christian had set down his cup. "He is a stick, a ramrod in fact, I agree."

"John Christian!" His wife had sounded half-distressed.

"Something we did not bargain for in one of our children, my dear," her husband said. "I wonder sometimes if all this correctness is not overdone, if it isn't a bit out-of-date, like maidenly modesty and large families and crinolines. Odd that the three should go together so well. Or perhaps not odd."

"John Christian, you exaggerate," his wife said.

"Sarah," John Christian went on, leaning back in his chair, "I should like our sons to marry very fertile women so that we might have a great many grandchildren."

"It is time our sons married, I quite agree," Sarah said and sighed. "They will marry young women with hobble skirts, and long cigarette-holders, and have perhaps one child each," she said.

"*O tempora, O mores.*" John Christian had yawned and got to his feet. "And now, my dears, I must get back to the slate quarry."

As even Barbara Nancy knew, he had gone not to the slate quarry but to his study upstairs, to smoke one or two very small cigars and work upon one more chapter of his book, which was to be entitled, her aunt said, "supposing it ever got so far as a title, *A Parasite Remembers.*"

It had been a frivolous and lighthearted time. It was over now. Barbara Nancy sighed. She had left the Mani-

folds' house; she would certainly go back. She looked out of the carriage window. Before her now at the end of this journey were a regiment of Furness cousins, and Tamlin. Her mind dwelt curiously for a second upon Tamlin. He will have forgotten me, she told herself stoutly. I am older, I am seventeen, for that reason he will pay me more attention, another part of her mind said. She continued to look out of the window. The countryside, that in the same moment seemed to expand and contract before her eyes, appeared colder, barer. The sun cast faint yellow shadows upon the round hills; the wide valleys, bare of trees, were chequered with dark stone walls and narrow shining streams. Here and there long headlands jutted out like the bare decks of ships. Everywhere were grey, scarcely-moving, milky clouds; colours were delicate and fine; even the air showed a light shining grey.

"This is the North: I belong here." From habit and, on this occasion, from pleasure and anticipation also, she spoke aloud.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHASM

THE fields, white with oats, or dusky gold with ripening corn, tilted quietly towards the sky; behind her the valley was lost in the upward slope of the headland, and lost again where the grey cliffs struck sharply down to the sea. The house seemed dwarfed under the wide arch of the sky, under the steep tilt of the fields. In all the landscape scarcely a thing moved; only the water-wheel turned dizzily like a child's toy.

Barbara Nancy sat on a wall within sight of the farm-house at Thwaites, waiting for Tamlin. She drummed her

feet happily against the stones, only pausing now and then to take a bite in turn of the bread and butter, the slice of pork pie, and the large green apple that lay beside her on the white plate. The last few days, and events with them, had fairly twirled out of sight. She had been disconcerted at first by so much traffic and stir. Her Furness cousins seemed always to be about the house, stooping their heads under the low rafters, tramping about the stone floors, helping themselves to glasses of ale or cider in the pantry, smoking, like whales spouting (Barbara Nancy's private images were nothing if not profuse), leaving, in short, such a whiff of masculinity behind them in the smell of leather and tweed and horses and tobacco that she was all but overpowered. Almost always Tamlin was there, absorbed, apparently, in himself, taking little notice of her, taking little notice of anyone, it seemed. She had not been hurt or surprised by so much neglect. She had not been particularly disappointed. Tamlin walks by himself. She had always known that. No one would expect Tamlin to change.

About the kitchen as about a large part of the house there was always the smell of bread baking and the rich warm smells that come from open oven doors. Even on an afternoon, Mary Furness, her Uncle John's new wife, might be seen, frowning over her accounts, seated at the kitchen table under the round noisy clock that hung on the wall. Mary was almost as tall as John, and a little more than half his age. She wore five-gored skirts that reached to her ankles and blouses with turned-down men's collars that almost touched her ears. Her straw-coloured hair was damp and shining and gathered into a wide knot behind. She strode rather than walked from broad hips, on wide feet cased in the flattest of granny shoes. There was a kindness about her that never intruded or overflowed. After you had seen her and been with her for a little while your ideas of beauty changed; when you went away, even for a short while, she stayed more than any picture-postcard beauty

in your mind. She and all her people belonged to Swaledale. Looking at her one day—"You are like the fields around here," Barbara Nancy said. With her Uncle John's wife as with the Manifolds it was possible to say almost anything that came into her mind. "You mean I am big enough. Ay, I am that," Mary had answered contentedly.

John Furness had found her, a young widow working her own farm, at the other end of the dale. He had made one more journey to look at her a second time; at the third he had brought her and her daughter Felicity away. When Barbara Nancy and he were out together one morning John Furness had spoken of his new wife. "I married her to have some comfort by me," he said. "I never married her so that she might take the place of Kate." Then, "I remember your mother. Your mother was always very nesh and fine."

When he spoke again the vague pity Barbara Nancy was beginning to feel for her Aunt Mary fled. "I couldn't be such a fool when I found her as to leave your Aunt Mary bide," John said.

At that moment old Joe Waters, the shepherd, passed to the rickyard. Barbara Nancy ceased to drum her heels upon the wall. Joe was old and crusty and a bachelor. Felicity had whistled once in his presence. "A lass has her place," old Joe had said. "But a whustlin' woman and a crawin' hen is neether fit fer God nor men."

Barbara Nancy's thoughts took a sudden turn. It was Tamlin now that occupied her mind. She had sat between the Furness twins, John Willy and William John, on their way to the cricket match. It was an annual family affair fixed for the twenty-eighth of July, at which the Furnesses played, eleven of them, against their distant cousins, the Ridleys, eleven Ridleys, at a village called Taycroft on the other side of the moor. Furnesses had won. While the game was being played all over again, Tamlin had come back from the village, an evening newspaper open in his hand.

"Looks as if I should never get to India or South Africa," he said.

"What's all this?" John Willy had leaned over Tamlin's shoulder and read for a moment. "Listen, me lads," he called to the rest. "Austria declares war on Servia. She receives a humble answer to her ultimatum. She doesn't trouble to reply. She declares war instead." John Willy broke off. "Perish the lot of them. We've won to-day." He clapped Tamlin upon the back. "Furnesses, one hundred and seventy-seven for six," he said.

Tamlin had stayed morose and silent.

This war in Europe can touch us, of course. But how? Barbara Nancy, looking anxiously at Tamlin, had asked silently.

As if to make amends for his mood Tamlin had approached her afterwards. "We'll go for a walk to a place I know," he said. "On Friday, that will be the thirty-first, shall we?"

Though nothing had changed, except that war was even nearer to-day, she felt oddly secure, waiting for Tamlin. Fear, after all, was something in oneself. She threw the core of her apple away; she looked up. A cloud, small and shaped like a humped crab, and travelling fast, showed in the sky. That is the war which everyone is discussing, which scarcely anyone in England wants. She did not finish her thought. She got down from the wall. Tamlin was coming towards her. The cloud and the war also seemed remote for a moment.

When Tamlin came up, "Germany is mobilizing," he said. He smiled at her, an odd fixed smile, and at once it was as though the cloud, grown larger, was back again, all but shutting out the sky. "Against whom?" she said. "Against everyone else, eventually," he said. For a time they did not speak. They were together; they felt the same; and yet it was as though a whole world had moved up and lay between their feet.

Later, walking beside Tamlin, nothing is real but the shadows, she thought. There had been a smell of dust from the road, of damp from the green hollows. At first the trees were dark masses of shadow, receding a little on either side. Tamlin and she had turned right from the road; the path, winding over the moor, then dropping steeply down, had been cushioned and springing with thyme under their feet.

All was open before them now, flat and untenanted, empty with the waiting silence of a moor at dusk, of earth always before sunrise or sunset. Shadows were solid and still; each boulder, each stunted tree or wind-blown bush was only a denser shadow.

They walked, whether for a long or a short while neither of them could have said. As if they walked in a dream they were conscious of no physical effort; their feet made no sound; aware of each other and their own company, they did not speak. Dark walls made rough crossings over the moor, here and there sheep were a pale huddle under them. The path mounted steeply again as if it climbed towards the light; flower-heads could be seen faintly moving through the thickness of dusk; a few stars swam faintly in the misty sky. If it were not for the stars, Barbara Nancy thought childishly, we could not be sure of finding the sky. Large grey stones marked the path from this point; large boulders rose up, solid and wedge-shaped, as it were out of a still river of green.

They came on the chasm suddenly at the top of a green hill through a wicket gate that laid three dark bars of quiet against the sky. At the other side of the gate a narrow path, marked by more boulders and triangular sharks' fins of stones, wound round the hill. The path, along the outermost edge of which a small fence ran, was shadowy; the stones were unreal and shadowed too; from the dampness of the air and the mist that Tamlin said always lay about the moor, the grass glowed emerald. On this side of the

hill-face was a sharp cleavage and fall of earth; on the other side an abrupt darkness lay.

They waited, looking across the chasm towards the moor beyond and the rose-streaked westerly line of sky.

"This is 'Udden's Hill, perhaps Odin's Hill. I often come here when I am at Thwaites," Tamlin said.

There was a strangeness about the place that the sound of their voices only appeared to make more strange. Not the green hill only nor the piled layers of stone, time itself, they could almost fancy, lay under their feet: time, mindless, unseeing, time conquering, time everlasting. Time lies over all. We are part of the quiet here, of the day that is gone, of the night. And all the days and nights are stored up and harvested. To what end? Unaccustomed questionings posed themselves in the strangeness that filled both their minds. From tiredness—a tiredness that came suddenly—Barbara Nancy experienced something like fear, and after that a faintness that resembled the same fear. She closed her eyes. Almost she spoke aloud. I could all but fancy I felt the earth moving under my feet.

Tamlin touched her elbow. He pointed. "I often see her about this time."

A house showed now in the dusk before them, and a woman, a lighted candle in her hand, could be seen moving from room to room. They could see her bent head, her bowed shoulders, the straight tightly-drawn hair.

"She lives alone. I fancy she goes the rounds every night at dusk," Tamlin said. He touched Barbara Nancy's arm again. "Let's go."

They came back once more over the moor. Unperceived by them the stars had blossomed like flowers; thick as flowers now they covered the face of the sky.

"It's the same way back," Tamlin said.

"I like the same way." Barbara Nancy moved her hand in an odd gesture Tamlin felt rather than saw. "The same way never looks the same," she said.

Silence had been companionable between them. Talk was difficult now and not clear. Over them both on the way back was a heaviness of spirit of which they could not speak.

"If this is war it will alter everything. I used to say I liked things altered," Tamlin said.

"I like not to feel they have altered," Barbara Nancy said.

The lamps were lit along the road as they passed, burning like still yellow-green lilies in the dark; there was the same smell of dust and damp from the green hollows. They looked back along the way they had come. The moor appeared to have retreated upon itself; now as they looked back it showed impenetrable and dark.

"And all that I have been thinking boils down to something quite trivial, that this war is a damned interference with our private lives, that it's not necessary, that I don't want it," Tamlin said. He spoke bitterly, but Barbara Nancy could not speak.

John Willy stepped out of the house to meet them. When he was close upon them he stumbled a little over the stones. and swore, then at once spoke seriously. "Well, what do you think of it? What? Now?"

"Think of what?" Tamlin answered on an impatient note.

"We haven't been thinking, exactly," Barbara Nancy said.

"They've mobilized. Germany's mobilized." John Willy swept an exasperated hand over his hair.

"If Germany wants her war she can have it," Tamlin said, and he pushed ahead of them into the house.

"You could make a Prussian of that fellow if you tried, you could that," John Willy said, staring after Tamlin. He turned to Barbara Nancy then. "If war comes it will set me back a thousand years." With one hand he cut at a moth held in the beam of light from the open door. "It's

all so darned dim, nobody can see a yard ahead," he said.

"Perhaps after all there won't be war." Barbara Nancy spoke without any hope at all, in a tired flat voice.

"You bet there'll be war," John Willy said. He opened his hand; as if in sudden violence of feeling he flipped something with one finger. In a curve like a star falling the moth fell through the beam of light.

"Why did you have to do that, why?" Barbara Nancy cried. Feeling sick and confused she made her way once more into the house.

She looked back. There, seen through the open door of the kitchen, was John Willy staring at her in astonishment and Mary pausing in the midst of her baking, the light from the hanging lamp making a halo of silver-gilt of her hair.

She sat down at the long table and leaned her elbows upon it. From physical tiredness her brain spun dizzily.

Mary turned to John Willy and spoke with the crisp air of someone wishing to bring a conversation to an end. "Almost as soon as it is over, this war will be forgotten, see if it isn't," she said.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GUARDSMAN'S DRUM

THE train, in a wreath of vapours, began to move out of the station. In the same moment Barbara Nancy leaned out of the carriage window and lifted a hand in farewell. Five of her cousins were on the platform to wish her goodbye, standing in a row in blue serge suits and straw hats, and looking, she could not help but feel affectionately, like very nice policemen in plain clothes on a seaside holiday. In the midst of them, a small bedecked maypole among

rough forest trees, stood Felicity, looking hot and uncomfortable and cross besides, in white muslin and white gloves and a large hat wreathed with flowers and spiked with two crossed silver hatpins.

The train gathered pace. "Goodbye," Barbara Nancy called. "Goodbye." She bade goodbye not only to her cousins and to what, still romantically, she termed the North, but to a great deal else besides. Indeed, strangeness and partings, as she was soon to discover, were in the air. The strangeness was borne in upon her only gradually as one coloured county after another on the long road to Worcestershire twirled past. At every large station a nameless stir quite different from the usual August Bank Holiday bustle could be felt. It was as if some new process were being unrolled, some vast slow-moving machine set in motion. There appeared to be no tension, scarcely any discernible excitement; instead of excitement, or so it seemed to her, was an air almost of waiting. People appeared to stand about even more than was usual at railway stations; more heads, she could fancy, were thrust out of carriage windows. People were aware of each other, and no one, it seemed to her, pretended any longer that there was not another person within sight. It might be, she thought, that all these people whom she observed were, like herself, beginning to be conscious of the nearness of vast events, as they would have been of the unseen vibration of enormous wheels.

For all its solemnity the journey to-day, like all other journeys, had its humours. Her mind was divided between odd, disjointed reflections and her fellow passengers. Of these latter Mr. and Mrs. Armenius—their many baskets and bundles were so bedecked with labels no one could help but read their owners' names—appeared much the most interesting. Mr. Armenius was a gaunt old man, bleached and bright as bone, so stiff from arthritis he moved creakingly like a wooden doll. His eyes were grey and sharp like ice

in his polished ivory-coloured face. Mrs. Armenius was gentle, and comfortable, and slow. She had large flat bones sparsely clothed in flesh; she wore a flowing black coat and there was a fallen red rose in her hat. Whenever the train stopped Mr. Armenius would inquire of her fiercely: "Kin we get out here, mawther?" and Mrs. Armenius in the most slurring of Worcestershire accents —they were bound for Worcester, all their labels proclaimed—would reply: "S'not time yet, fawther." And, as if to quieten Mr. Armenius by proxy, she would press a callused but queerly gentle hand upon the duck's head. For a large white duck that was for ever stretching out a long white neck from a fisherman's brown basket travelled with them.

With every second the train sped nearer Worcester and farther from the North. With a faint sense of nostalgia, and a sensation of emptiness, which might, after all, mean no more than the approach of lunch-time, Barbara Nancy sat back in her corner. My grand tour is over; I have changed, I have become different, her thoughts went. But where the change lay she could scarcely imagine as yet. The train shot into a tunnel, bright lights flashed and ran before her eyes. I know nothing, yet one day I shall know everything—suddenly and inconsequently the thought came to her.

Her mind turned once more to the events of the previous night. Stooping suddenly, Tamlin had kissed her though without saying goodbye. Out of astonishment she had said, "Thank you." He had laughed, then caught back his laugh as if he feared to offend. And that, she had felt at once, was something new in Tamlin. It had been dark where they were in the stone corridor between the two rooms. Outside the night was velvety, pricked with sharp stars; within the house were bright lights and a babble of voices. John Willy had groped his way towards them. He had work to do, Tamlin had said in the next moment. There was, it ap-

peared, yet another examination in mining which he desired to pass. Not saying any more, he had gone off to his room. She had not been offended at so much abruptness; since Tamlin did nothing like anyone else, she had told herself again, why expect Tamlin to say goodbye?

Their embrace had been an isolated, an oddly impersonal affair. Nothing very much had preceded it; nothing very significant had followed. If she had remembered it all a great many times since, she had not done so, she assured herself hastily, in order to dream of Tamlin, or indeed to dream of anything in particular.

But here once more Mr. Armenius interrupted her flow of thought.

"Caarn's bad"—he jerked an arthritic chin.

The corn—a field of standing corn ran beside the railway track at this point—was indeed bad. She was about to agree with Mr. Armenius when his wife spoke again.

"Fawther cawn't abear to see the caarn that bad."

It is bad, once more Barbara Nancy wished to say. But here the duck thrust a head out of its basket, shut one yellow-rimmed eye and fixed the other inflexibly upon her.

"What an extraordinary duck," she declared instead and immediately became confused.

It was a Samoyede, she understood Mrs. Armenius to say. But that, even for this duck, even for Mrs. Armenius, was clearly unlikely. She continued, for a variety of sensible reasons, to look in an anchored way out of the window.

Just as the train was sliding to a standstill, "Kin we get out here, mawther? Why kin't we get out here?" Mr. Armenius inquired on a rising note.

"Tesn't home yet, fawther. Tes some other place. Tes so." Mrs. Armenius spoke composedly.

"Birmingham. Birmingham," the other passengers, busily taking their luggage down from the racks, declared patiently.

Barbara Nancy followed Mr. and Mrs. Armenius on to the platform. She waited. She looked across at the bright

moving pattern of the holiday throng passing in a solid stream down the steps, then overflowing in a kind of slow relentlessness upon the platform. The sun burned through the glass roof, warming as it did so the faces of the crowd, picking out all the bright colours, the scarlets, the purples, the greens. The clock overhead whirred as if an iron bird imprisoned inside had flapped its wings. The hour was struck, but from the hiss of steam and the shouts of the porters scarcely anyone heard.

In the midst of it all a Grenadier Guardsman came walking very carefully down the steps leading to the platform. Before him he held a gold and scarlet ceremonial drum; almost he appeared to embrace it with both hands. Just as Barbara Nancy's father was to be seen making his way towards her, the Guardsman, while still advancing up the platform, whether from bravado or a love of his instrument, or for some other reason, beat his drum. The sound, a light patter at first, then a deep roll, was like gunfire far off, then like gunfire moving in. The vibration lasted a full second, the last ripple of sound seemed to linger in the air. Everyone was startled; everyone turned to look. For an instant everyone, Barbara Nancy could not doubt it, felt and thought the same thing. For an instant the anxiety that was in everyone's mind came nearer, became more real. It was as though war had stretched out a hand and touched each one of them. "You," the voice of the drum seemed to say, "and you. And you."

Regardless of the momentary perturbation he had caused, the Guardsman passed on up the platform, then—Barbara Nancy noted the fact with an instantaneous lowering of temperature—turned sharp left into the refreshment room. Already the local train, the brass top of its ancient engine newly polished and bright, was puffing out steam in the bay, the usual milk-cans were being rolled in, several cows were looking wildly out of the last coach and the guard was about to wave his green flag.

"Plenty of time," Barbara Nancy's father said, not hurrying at all and tucking yet another newspaper under his arm.

Barbara Nancy entered the compartment. I am home already, she thought, her mind stirred once more to a romantic exaggeration by the lowing of cows, the heavy gait of her fellow passengers, and the sight of Guard Tuff's pointed yellow beard. "Where is Plompartay?" she inquired. "Is the Philosopher back from camp yet?" Then, inconsequently, she said: "The blue ribbons in my hat are faded."

"You've powdered your nose," wrinkling up his own nose, her father said.

The train stopped at one flowery station after another. It halted now and then, as was only to be expected, just where it pleased. They passed green meadows made populous with red and white cattle, meadows less green made merely comfortable with sheep, orchards weighted with fruit, churches with castellated towers, round ponds, ringed with willows, sailing small clouds like boats. Everything was familiar and yet, by distance and contrast, strange. Unlike Yorkshire, nothing here seemed plain or large, everything was decorated and small, and in the near distance the Avon flowed, not tempestuously, but serpentine and broad, and silvered in the sun, between nicely scalloped banks of green.

The train slid once more to a standstill. Barbara Nancy spoke absently. "How old would you say this train is?" "Old enough to be scrapped," her father said. He, too, wore an absent air.

From extreme leisureliness everything in the next moment took on a new urgency. Here was yet one more bowery station, one more stretch of station garden, festooned like a wedding-cake with hanging chains and garlands of white and pink roses. Here, beyond the station, were the contemplative fields, and here, under their eyes, the

even more contemplative porter sitting upon his empty barrow.

But the door of the compartment was all at once flung open; a man in shapeless corduroys and collarless shirt leaped in. There were pieces of straw caught in the lace-holes of his hobnailed boots, bits of chaff held in the worn cloth of his working-coat. He slammed to the door, pulled down the window, and—the train was already moving—leaned out. "It'll be over soon, sure to," he said, his voice rough. And then, to the woman on the platform before him, a child in her arms: "Give us a kiss, girl, ah, give us a kiss."

The train gathered pace; the flowers, the rose-laden chains, the woman and the child in her arms were left behind; the man dropped back into his corner. An emotion that was disturbing and incomplete invaded Barbara Nancy then. She was aware of her own compassion; at the same time she felt herself assailed by a sense almost of alarm. Once more she felt herself as it were outside. For here, for the second or third time in her life, was feeling more naked than she had known.

The image of the woman and the child stayed in her mind. The woman had smiled and nodded; she had wept also, the tears rolling unchecked down her cheeks. She had held the child stiffly before her in an odd, almost sacrificial manner. On the man's face there had been something of passion, something of wildness also that resembled anger and yet was not anger, that was probably parting and grief.

The man was tapping a cigarette against a finger now and speaking in abrupt phrases, the wildness flickering still on his hard, sunburned face.

"It's all this coming on her so sudden. 'They want you, Jim,' she says, coming to me in th'harvest field not more'n a couple of hours ago. She got up from her bed to come to me. I'd bin expectin' it. I hung about the house yesterday expectin' it. But it had to come when I was out."

"So we're mobilizing?" Edward Furness said, lighting his pipe with steady fingers and throwing the match away.

"Ah," the man said. He drew hard on his cigarette. "I'll find plenty I know the other end." He was silent. "Reckon we know what we're about this time," he said again. "They bin askin' for it long enough, the Germans have."

He bent and began to pull the straw from his boots. Looking up at Barbara Nancy, he spoke apologetically: "You can't keep the straw out. Not nohow you can't."

Once more the train slid to a standstill. Here at last was Sigbarrow and Alne.

"I'll shake down when I get there," the man said as they bade him goodbye. It was as if he were comforting them. Already, in mind at least, he had moved away.

At Sigbarrow station everything was just as one would have expected it to be. The rambler roses had faded, the calceolarias were hideously in bloom; a man, mounted on a tall ladder, was picking Pershore plums in the adjoining gardens and while the man was aloft his dog slept under the plum tree.

Barbara Nancy looked back. On the surface nothing in Sigbarrow and Alne ever changed. Even as the thought came to her, the train, as if it would stand for a symbol of time itself, steamed tranquilly away. Only one thing was different: their fellow passenger alone in the compartment, tense still, leaning forward as the train passed like someone about to start in a race.

CHAPTER FOUR

BEHIND THE SHOUTING, THE SILENCE

It was scarcely October yet. The leaves came down singly or in pairs; they danced slowly down. There were warm reflections everywhere; even the pools in the road

held rosy amber lights from all the trees, chestnut and maple and beech, that arched overhead, and the washed blue of sky in the west was striped with apricot and gold. A flock of starlings flew over. Since the sun had all but gone, they cast no shadow.

Paradise Hill was long and steep, a dangerous hill, the local wiseacres said, bad for waggons, worse for bicycles, worse still for motor-cars. But Paradise Hill held no terrors for Robert Furness. For almost eight weeks, not counting all the many earlier occasions, he had walked up the hill and cycled down it on his way to and from Lattisforde. He had made the double journey on four evenings of every week with increasing disillusionment since war had been declared. And now he had decided he would never cycle to Lattisforde on this errand again. Never, he told himself happily. For never did not seem a long time to him.

As he free-wheeled down, the road appeared to come up in a welcoming fashion to greet him, the trees did a slow turn, then fell behind; a wind that was peculiarly his, he felt, as the hill was his, and everything he could feel or see—the wind sang in the telegraph wires, hummed and sang in his bicycle wheels, then sped past, and not another person was within sight. At the foot of the hill on his right was the farm, its water-wheel turning, its gardens and lawns laid out in coloured squares, and the old horse standing still in the field and lifting a head, as he felt it always did, to look at him as he passed.

The hill was left behind; his own pace, and the wind's pace with it, slackened; now the bicycle creaked merely with age; the singing was done. As he pedalled on the Philosopher was aware of a deep excitement within him and a vast content. This is what I'll do, I'll do nothing else, his mind, for ever repeating the same theme, said. He saw no further; he wished to see no further than that. Coming down Paradise Hill on a bicycle had made him feel what he must do. He cycled on, and still the light held, as it

does on early autumn evenings; the leaves seemed even yet to burn against the dusk.

On Sigbarrow bridge a white poster, one of several he had seen that day, was prominently displayed. "Your King and Country Need You," the Philosopher read again. Surely, he thought, that for almost anyone was enough.

The swans sailed on down the river, a small wind ruffled their half-unfolded wings and flicked the dark surface of the water with feather tips; the bulrushes showed velvety and dark, and the new paint on the white railings that bordered the road held a bluish gleam. He had seen it all a thousand times, and yet to-night it was as though he saw it all vividly for the first time. In a way it is mine. I shall remember it like this, always, he thought.

To-day, the first Tuesday in October—he had almost forgotten it until the smoke from the caravans of the fair people reminded him again—was the occasion of the Sigbarrow annual Mop. All the fair people would be here—from long acquaintance every Furness was familiar with their names. There would be swinging-boats, shooting-galleries, Aunt Sally booths and the rest. Scarcely anything of the fair was to be seen when the Philosopher had set out for Lattisforde early that afternoon; there was everything to be seen now. In a few hours the sober church-and-chapel-going market town of Sigbarrow had suffered much more than a sea change. The whole of the long curving High Street, from the church at one end to the Castle o' Comfort at the other, towered with painted wooden erections looking to English eyes as grotesque and almost as brilliant as Burmese temples. The swinging-boats were hoisted high so that they looked on the round face of the clock set in the church tower; Peters' motors were lined in place on the round platform, and the Bluebeard's tower of Strickland's helter-skelter, green, splashed with scarlet and gold, overtopped them all. The Philosopher cycled slowly past. Mr. Peters himself came out of his caravan and, as deliber-

ately as a stage manservant lighting candles, lit one flare after another before the stalls and the booths. The Philosopher rode on, under the swinging sign of the Castle o' Comfort, up the hill between the marching columns of fir trees, over the humped bridge into Alne. As he did so the lights, shining warmer and steadier than any stars, came out on the low line of hills, and the dusk was gathering itself together as it always seems to do before it takes flight into the dark.

He came on through the vaulted side passage of the house into the paved courtyard. Late in the season though it was, the fuchsias still drooped their red and blue pagoda-shaped flowers; the white Japanese anemones shone out in the dusk. It was warm between the two stone walls, and the air, an autumn damp about it, seemed full of the bitter smell of dead leaves. He would tell them now what was in his mind; from the next moment all that he had imagined for himself would begin, he thought, and he leaned his bicycle over-carefully against the wall.

Barbara Nancy came out of the house to meet him, a bowl with a posy of coloured flowers painted upon it in her hand.

"Custard. Have some." She waved a spoon.

He nodded. Afterwards he remembered how wide her eyes went as her look met his and how for no more than a moment she seemed to stay still. I won't have to tell her, she knows already, he thought. He remembered how close they had grown together since the Fisherman had gone, as if, he had told himself, there had not been so much room for him before. In these days it was as if their minds went three-parts of the way together, as if words were only necessary to make clear the small part that was left.

Sitting together on the well-seat they shared the custard, something they had not done for a long time. Small, irrelevant thoughts formed themselves and floated on the surface of the Philosopher's mind; he noticed how Barbara Nancy's

mouth quirked up a little to one side like his father's mouth, that she looked cooler and more remote in the dusk. I am glad, he thought, as if this cool air of hers were a permanent thing. I am alone; I shall have to go on like that alone, no one too close, no one who is not of the same company. He was young, and the war was young with him, and it seemed to him in the height of the moment that he was indeed to be one of a company.

"We are still drilling with broomsticks at Lattisforde." He smiled as he spoke, an odd secret smile that scarcely reached his eyes, that had nothing to do with her, Barbara Nancy felt, and only a little to do with what the Philosopher said.

"Broomsticks!" she repeated. Her voice, since she was a little afraid of what else lay hidden at the bottom of the Philosopher's mind, sounded dull and uncomprehending even to herself.

When you look for something in someone else's mind you are always a bit afraid, the Philosopher thought understandingly. He took the spoon she offered and once more helped himself.

For a moment Barbara Nancy did not speak. She was aware of small sounds, of the tenseness of her own hands, of the bees buzzing about the flowers. "How late they work," she said.

"They haven't much time left, that's why," the Philosopher, still smiling, said.

"I don't see that anyone can drill with broomsticks," at last his sister said.

"I'm not going to any longer," he said.

Barbara Nancy pushed the bowl back again. "Finish it." Her mind went on ahead. "If you join up, what do you think the Fisherman will do?"

The Philosopher ran the spoon very neatly round the rim of the bowl before he spoke. "I thought I would write to him," he said finally.

She nodded. The Fisherman, they both felt once more, had never quite become reconciled to his own going away. It was as if the misunderstanding between Robert and himself had got in the way of his remembering them, as if he were unable to start on the new life with any contentment while he was still dissatisfied with the old.

"If he came and then went back," Barbara Nancy began. If John did that, she thought, and was silent, he would be easier in his mind, and Robert and he would finally be reconciled. For John need only come back to know that the rivalry between Robert and himself had been on the surface only, that nothing was left of it now.

The Philosopher appeared to read her thought. "He'll come if I ask him," he declared confidently.

"And you will be away for three years," his sister said. "Three years or the duration," the Philosopher said. To them both for the space of a moment three years seemed a long time.

Plompartay passed them then. He did so with a lowering look. "Sitting about in the dark," he remarked disapprovingly.

"He thinks we are hatching plots," the Philosopher said.

"So we are." Barbara Nancy stood up. She was conscious of a vague, troubled excitement. Her mind, like the Philosopher's own mind, went no further than that.

"I'll find Plom. I'll tell him," the Philosopher said. He too got up. He went off after Henry.

The sitting-room lamp glowed pale as yet; presently, like the sun, it would glow orange-red. With its round globe and spreading base it looked like a Victorian lady in mantle and crinoline—Barbara Nancy amused herself with thoughts and small pictures that were like thoughts. The Philosopher was pleading for himself very diffidently. "This way I shall learn soldiering. It's quicker this way." Plompartay stood close by the Philosopher's elbow and looked

very heavy and solid and dependable, like a man-at-arms. At the same time he was breathing hard, as if there were roast pork and apple sauce for dinner, his sister thought. Their mother sewed quickly, too quickly, never once looking up, her face shadowed and dark. Their father, his head bent, his pipe unlit in his hand, had not spoken yet.

"I have made up my mind," the Philosopher said. Standing up, his legs crossed, he appeared very tall under the low ceiling of the room.

"Couldn't you wait?" his father asked. Their mother put down her work.

"I would rather go now," the Philosopher said.

Their father turned to their mother. She spoke swiftly. "Robert will go in any case. His mind is set on it." Her voice seemed to match her thoughts.

"In his place I'd go," their father said, a sudden stir, as if he were young again, in his voice.

"I'll go to-morrow." An air of contentment about him, the Philosopher dropped into a chair. He went on speaking. "Territorials, or Kitchener's First Army—I don't mind. It makes no difference. I shall learn soldiering. I shall learn about things properly now."

Their father cleared his throat. "That's settled then." But their mother's hands moved uncontrollably in her lap and, just as suddenly, were still.

A moth swung nearer and nearer the round globe of light. I hate it, Barbara Nancy thought, when a moth flies like that, when it falls, burned by the light, soft and sudden, like a dead bird.

Her mother got suddenly to her feet, and drew the yellow curtains close over the lighted window. The moth blundered against them, a brown blurred shape, beside it its own desperate climbing shadow. Their father turned up the wick of the lamp. Now the warm, faintly oily radiance reached to the four corners of the room, and the Philosopher's long shadow in the grandfather chair showed on the wall

with all their shadows, and Brock Doddington, having knocked twice and received no answer, knocked again and came into the room.

He gave one quick look round. "I'll come back," he said.

"I'm ready," Barbara Nancy said. She got up then. She went out with Brock Doddington.

"I don't feel I wish to volunteer," Brock said presently, swinging a hand and walking beside Barbara Nancy on the road to Sigbarrow. "Frankly, those recruiting-posters, though I can see they might mean a great deal to Robert, mean absolutely nothing to me. 'Your Country Needs You.' What nonsense! We are not in any danger of being invaded."

"We might be," Barbara Nancy declared hotly.

Brock slipped a hand into his pocket again. He became earnest and almost warlike in his turn. "All this talk of saving civilization—surely it is dishonest talk. Surely—or so it seems to me—a war on this scale can only help to destroy civilization."

"And democracy—is that just another war cry?" after a moment's indignant silence Barbara Nancy said.

"Not quite," Brock said. "Oh, not quite. If we were a real democracy and in danger, I think I would fight. But we aren't a real democracy. Money rules with us. Money is the measure of everything, money buys the best of everything. If it did not"—here Brock turned to her—"your brothers would be up at Oxford with me. For it is only the scholarship I managed to win and the money my father has made of late in the timber trade that sent me there."

"Isn't all that you are saying now only an excuse?" Barbara Nancy said. "An excuse for doing nothing, I mean?"

"If everyone else gets war-fever and goes mafficking, I may help to keep reason alive," Brock said.

"That is conceited, at the very least," Barbara Nancy said.

"Shall I leave you?" Brock said. "I think I will." At once he plunged across the road, then almost immediately was lost to sight.

He must go over the field, of course, Barbara Nancy thought. In order to get wet feet, in order to punish me, in order to make the whole affair between us appear as tragic as possible, so that I shall be as sorry as possible. Disgusted, and yet faintly remorseful in spite of herself, she walked on. Just as the lights of Sigbarrow were within sight Brock appeared again.

He was fuming still. "Liberty," he declared hotly—"if you are thinking of liberty, at the end of this war liberty will be just where it was at the beginning. If it is not in a worse case. And so will the small nations. Nothing in war is worth the cost of it. War is dead against reason." He broke off just as furiously. He thrust his hands in his pockets; he took them out again. "I can't think why I am saying all this. All you Furnesses are dead against reason too."

"There are a great many Furnesses in England," Barbara Nancy answered composedly. She wished to halt there. Nevertheless she felt obliged to go on. "Liberty is worth keeping alive. It belongs in part to this country. It is alive now."

"If you can believe there is any connection between cant of that sort and what I have in my mind you can believe anything," Brock said.

What was left of Barbara Nancy's calm deserted her. She accused him now. "You were always contrary. You always felt compelled to object. If you could you would always say No."

"Be careful," Brock said, breathing hard.

"You never dared do anything. You always did look at things, the river for instance, and shiver, and invent reasons, and hold back." She paused.

"You know," Brock said, "I hate you for bringing all that up now."

"I don't think your reasons are real reasons either," Barbara Nancy said.

"You think I am a coward," Brock said. "I don't know, I don't know how I can go on feeling as I do about you after this."

"Please don't run off again," Barbara Nancy said.

"You know, you are very childish sometimes. Unpleasantly childish." Brock spoke tolerantly now, as if the fact that he was able to condescend made him feel less annoyed.

As quietly as if they had not quarrelled he said presently: "I feel too many different things at the same time, I suppose. And one should never try to say all that is in one's mind."

Barbara Nancy began firmly. "If you believe in a thing——"

He interrupted her. "If you believe in a thing, you must follow your belief. That is what you were going to say. But I am not so sure of what I believe. If I were Robert I would do what he is doing. But I am myself, less solid, less certain. Beliefs, principles, values—they all appear less solid to me than to you or to any member of your family. And if these are not my real reasons, or related to my real reasons, then I know nothing. Nothing," Brock said. He waited, then spoke again so quietly that the last of Barbara Nancy's surprising ill-temper fled. "You are right in one thing. I do feel a secret horror of war. I say secret. It was secret until you uncovered it."

"I am sorry," Barbara Nancy said stiffly.

"Don't be sorry. Though on the whole it is easier for Furnesses, I believe," he said.

He turned silent then, like a man contending with his own thoughts, and Barbara Nancy, visited by remorse and a certain faint stirring of compassion, was silent with him, and obstinate as well. What I said was true. what I said needed to be said, her mind went.

They had reached the centre of the little town by this time, and the Mop, a dazzle of garish colour and bustle and light, was laid out before them, all the merry-go-rounds in full motion in the long channel of the High Street.

Brock turned to her with an effort. "You did say the wooden horses?"

Peters' wooden horses, greys with scarlet and gold trappings, rode up and down majestically on their rods of fluted brass upon the round wooden platform, under an umbrella-like canopy of green. Barbara Nancy and Brock mounted. The electric dynamo thumped, the orchestra of dummy figures grouped round the central stem started up: the Red Indians beat their tom-toms; the Egyptian maidens, with small precise movements, clashed their cymbals; the heralds presented their trumpets. Slowly at first, then faster and faster, the platform began to revolve, the wooden horses sawed up and down. Below them—for Sigbarrow Mop was a noted event and everyone, old and young, attended—a large crowd flowed slowly past.

Brock leaned over Barbara Nancy and looked down on the mass of red, upturned faces, and spoke morosely. "These people can be led anywhere. They can be made to believe anything."

"That is not quite true. I can't bear any more." Barbara Nancy referred not to Brock's somewhat declamatory mood, but to her own sick feelings. She dismounted with particular care when the horses came to a standstill.

They made their way to the large chestnut tree which stood outside the church and which was surrounded by a very convenient seat. Barbara Nancy sank gratefully upon it.

"Why did we call you Frog-face?" she asked. "I've forgotten."

"So have I. Perhaps you felt you had to be rude to me, even then," Brock said.

"I would like to be rude to someone else," Barbara Nancy declared. She looked ahead, at the Philosopher, who was

coming towards them, at Moll Mainwaring, who leaned upon the Philosopher's arm. "Not content with one of my brothers, she must have them both," she said.

"They want to be alone," Moll declared spitefully almost at the same moment, and she seated herself with the Philosopher on the other side of the chestnut tree.

Brock went on speaking as if the other two were not there. "Tamlin will be more scornful of me than ever," he said.

"In your place Tamlin would not mind. Must you mind?" Barbara Nancy asked bluntly.

"There is something rude and Northern about you after all," Brock said. "You are a little like Tamlin."

A peculiar silence, peculiar since it was charged with all their thoughts, followed. The Philosopher put his head round the tree-trunk and looked at them. And Moll, opening her mouth wide, began somewhat impudently to sing, "O Let the World Go By."

Presently, mounted once more upon two of Mr. Peters' horses, Brock and Barbara Nancy looked down upon the crowd. Once more the Egyptian maidens clashed their cymbals, the trumpeters presented their trumpets, the platform moved dizzily. Barbara Nancy, whose good humour was almost restored, began to sing Moll's song to herself: "O Let the World Go By." She ceased all at once. She waved a hand gaily at the crowd. "Everyone down there," she called romantically to Brock above the noise of the merry-go-round, "is the world."

"But what do you mean," Brock said, a new impatient note in his voice, "by the world?"

Margaret leaned her arms on the window sill of the open window and rested her chin upon them. She stayed there for a little while and scarcely moved. The noise of the fair came thickly over the fields from a distance of half a mile or more away. Behind the throb and pulse of the merry-go-

rounds the steady thump of the electric engine could be heard, insistent, regular, under the yellow umbrella of light, against the lilac-grey October sky. Her husband came up the stairs and laid a coat about her shoulders, and, without speaking, left her again. In a troubled abstraction of mind and body she no more than turned her head.

Already time that had flowed evenly for so long a stretch was marked off for her, and not for her only, into short uneven lengths, as though, she thought now, someone ticked off each day as it came on a calendar that hung on the wall: this day tolerably happy, this one heavy and burdensome and slow. Henceforth no one would ever dare count on to-morrow. To-morrow everything might be changed, or—even—to-morrow might never come.

She tried to thrust all fear for the Philosopher away. She did not regret the course affairs had taken. Where her sons were concerned she was no longer possessive. I resisted the Fisherman's going, she was wont to think, I am wiser now. Since his decision had been so large a part of himself it had not, indeed, been possible to deny Robert his wish. As if to make up for his plain face and somewhat awkward air, he had long nourished an adventurous turn of mind. Philosopher though he was, the past sang to him; the present was no more than a living continuation of the past. Knowing nothing of arms nor war, nor of the world, he was yet convinced that he must fight. For him as for so many hundreds of thousands more of his kind no compulsion was needed, everything he understood in the word duty was simple and plain. His mother was aware of all this as she was aware of so much else in her second son. She understood, for instance, his envy of the Fisherman's good looks, of the way in which the Fisherman, without wanting it very much, was liked and remembered everywhere. She was aware of all this in him as intimately as she was aware of the shape of his head or the feel of his hands between hers.

Nevertheless she remained troubled. A new kind of

anxiety, which was only a shadow yet of what it might become, possessed her mind. For this was war: something she had never thought of for her sons, something she had never known. It was, as it were, a new darkness through which men and women must go. War grew ever more constant and more terrible, and no one to-day could predict what it would be like, nor what demands it might make. Only men and women did not change: men and women remained vulnerable, mere body and spirit, mere blood and nerve and bone.

The moon floated in its own thoroughfare of sky; elsewhere were faint moonlit mists and rainbow-tinted shadows. Not a branch lifted, not a tree-top stirred.

Weighed down by the burden of her thoughts, it seemed to her quite suddenly that King and Country and the rest were words for which men died, that had nothing to do with love or life. In themselves they were nothing. And yet they appeared everything, as though behind all the every-day words and silences a trumpet sounded, and only the young men, and the men who were young at heart, heard and answered. I was never one, she thought, to thrill at the sound of the trumpet; there could never be any magic for me in the voices that Robert hears.

We are nothing, she thought again, and yet the heart, or whatever we must call the heart, is passionate and fearful always. And sorrow is piled up like dust, like dead leaves that the wind stirs. Only life lives and the mystery. And the words, the symbols and mottoes of courage and continuing, always continuing—she remembered her mother, for that had been her mother's faith—all these are necessary, are part of the rest. Even though the truth of this is hidden from me sometimes, I know that for a woman also something must exist that is different from love, that reaches further, that touches humanity.

Two young men on bicycles went by. As if to recall her to herself, they sang lustily as they came, the words, meaning-

less and vulgar though they were, ringing out with a kind of bravado into the still air: "I don't care what becomes of me, I don't care if I'm on the spree . . ." They passed, their lights made squat, flickering shadows on the dark surface of the road and the singing died away.

The emptiness that comes of too much feeling fell on Margaret then. Her hands—she touched her face with them—felt stiff and cold. Downstairs more coal was laid on the fire; a door opened, then shut. She stirred. Presently my world, and everything in my world, will stand comfortably about me again, she thought, until all this, like a view seen from the train, has slipped away from my mind.

As she waited the music from the fair blared louder, then ceased; the umbrella of light flashed and trembled, then grew dim. The night wind touched her face, went hopping lightfoot over the frosted grasses. In the next moment that, too, was gone. Now the silence seemed to gather itself together, to spread until, like sleep, it lay lightly upon everything; until even her mind was still.

PART VI

IN DEEP WOODS

CHAPTER ONE

"O CANADA, O CANADA!"

THE Fisherman stood in the open doorway of his compartment in the local train. More than one or two people glanced at him as they passed, at the clear-cut young face coloured a warm red and brown, at the maple leaves on his shoulder and the Glengarry cap with the chequered border of red and white on his head. The Fisherman had no thought of himself or of them. He was remembering things, and seeing them again at the same time: the brown teapot for ever warming by the fire in the porter's room, the station clock with the cracked face, the Gloire de Dijon rose trained to the wall, even the signalman looking out of his signal-box at his allotment and the buds on his apple trees. It was February and the buds were there.

As the train for Sigbarrow came punctually to a standstill at five minutes to eight, a few sleepy-looking travellers arrived, a few carrier pigeons took the air with a stiff bristle of wings, and the Fisherman, throwing his khaki greatcoat over his arm, stepped out. As all that was familiar came flooding back into his mind it seemed to him no more than a step in time since he had told himself, looking at the station clock as the train steamed out: When I come back, if I ever come back, that will have changed. The clock and the deep crack in the clock's face—both were there. To-day the sun was a flat orange in an opal sky, coming up, clouded and orange-red as he remembered it, from behind the tithe barn on the crest of the low hills; there was a cold wet

tang of sleet in the air, the goldfinches were burnished and gay as parakeets in the dark green of the fir trees. Looking about him, half-scornful and half-glad, as he breasted the hill, the Fisherman thought again: nothing of this will change in a hundred years.

He recalled a great many things, some of them irrelevant and small: the grey look of the stones in the paved courtyard of the house that always made him think of spring, the steady creak and turn of the cowl on the centre chimney-pot when the wind blew from the east, and the bugle's sound, even though it was only a scout's bugle, winding in and out of the rides of the wood, and Plompartay's prolonged blue stare, and Moll Mainwaring's eyes, slanting and catlike in the white heart-shaped face.

He recalled the different rivalries, which added up after all only to the one rivalry, between the Philosopher and himself, and the change his own restlessness and discontent had worked in him, tightening and hardening, as it were, all his mind, so that he had wanted nothing so much finally as to be quit of it all, quit of every tie that bound him here to the one place. He was quit now, hardened now; it was by his own wish that he had come back. Of Moll Mainwaring he thought, were her eyes blue or grey? He remembered her voice, so soft you could all but feel it, a bit rough too at the edge like some kinds of soft green leaf. She had long thin legs, that she was constantly crossing and uncrossing, in black thin stockings, legs which splayed out a bit like a calf's legs when she walked. He remembered she was always doing something to herself that kept you looking at her, that prevented you from thinking or feeling what she was really like. Perhaps I haven't forgotten her so much as I thought: the Fisherman spoke aloud, though rather under his breath.

He had come back of his own free will, it was true, though not without a letter from the Philosopher. "Are you coming? Come on," Robert had written, a postscript

only in a letter that had scarcely mentioned the war. Anything more elaborate might have failed of its purpose. As it was, wherever he went, whatever he did, the Philosopher's words, and the Philosopher's voice speaking the words, were there: "Are you coming? Come on." And the Fisherman's own pulse, as if someone had knocked loudly and unexpectedly, had answered. He had not written to the Philosopher; instead, he had come.

They had parted in the barest fashion. "So long," he had said only a moment before he left. His voice had sounded hard even to himself. The Philosopher, who was on his knees mending a bicycle tyre, had looked up and answered impassively: "So you're off. Well, goodbye." He remembered even yet, though he had ignored it at the time, the sudden contraction and darkening, the hurt gleam in the Philosopher's eyes.

He had come back for more reasons than one. For Robert's sake, yes. The Philosopher should not go off to France alone, he had resolved. And since all the other men whom he had known would be there, he would be there too. They would be in this thing together, he had felt, they would make one company. In the last resort it had not been the books he had read that had helped to bring him from oversea, not *Hereward the Wake*, nor *Pilgrim's Progress*, nor *Westward Ho!*, though he remembered them all; not recruiting marches and pipes and drums, not maidens with white feathers, nor generals with white moustaches, but something more obscure, a sense of belonging perhaps through bad times as well as good, or some instinct of perservation—the branches fighting, say, to preserve the roots. Whatever the reason, I'll be there, he had resolved; even if I have to kick my heels for a twelvemonth of waiting, I'll be there.

Too late for the First Canadian Expeditionary Force, they had told him at the recruiting-office in Winnipeg. The Second it had to be therefore. Once he was enrolled it had

been roses, or flowers at least, all the way for the Forty-Seventh Canadian Scottish, and baskets of fruit, apricots, peaches, apples and the rest. He had seen Niagara and thought not so much of it; had visited Quebec and reminded himself very suitably of Wolfe and Montcalm dying on the Heights of Abraham and the last-minute exchange of compliments between them, as if in dying, whatever one did in life, one must die to a brave gesture, as if dying were indeed an act which one played to trumpets on a vast stage.

He remembered the queer thrill and the sudden emptiness that had come to him as the transports began to move, so smoothly, so imperceptibly, away, and the half-continent that was Canada was left behind. Many hundreds of men had shared the same feeling with him, for quite suddenly they were all singing: "O Canada, O Canada!" and the sound had seemed to fill all the empty spaces of the great channel through which they passed. Surely so many voices could not be lost, he had thought, surely the air would hold their vibrations for ever. And I shall come back, he had promised himself humbly, if I am allowed, I shall come back.

He paused for a second now on the bridge at the top of the hill and looked at the orange sun mounting high above the barn, filling the wide-open door as it had always done with a splendour of flame, streaking the green velvet of the hill with long plush shadows, like the outspread fingers of a hand. After the long days and the great sun-splashed moving waste of sea, and the quiet that came down on you every night like the soft swish of rain, it was good to have solid earth under your feet, to hear waggons creaking, living human sounds again. The nearer he had come—not to England so much as to being here, at the end of his journey, or the beginning, if it seemed better to think of things that way—so the elation that had never left him since the time he had set out from Canada had grown.

They had docked at Plymouth. As they came in, so

quietly, the sea, as it were, bringing them in, elation had taken a sharper turn, had been transformed into something like pride, and he had thought: I always wanted to come into Plymouth from the sea this way, the way Drake came in the Golden Hind. And quite suddenly he was content. Contentment had stayed as the train had taken them through the rich quiet of the west to Sussex and the camp above Seaford, where the riderless downs run out to the sea. And now elation was painful like hunger, and contentment was like impatience, straining upon the next moment of time. And suddenly, as always, he was in the midst of the moment. Before him were the trees, just as he remembered them, the great ash, the three elms, the row of limes, and the distant curve of the river, and the wet gleam of the road, and the house waiting. And he had not grown too large for it, he felt, though that happened sometimes; nor too small, for that happened sometimes as well.

His legs carried him so fast up the last of the rise that Mrs. Fairey, who toiled after him, a basket over her arm, remarked smilingly to herself: There's somebody mighty valiant to get there.

The Fisherman talked as if he were used to talking, leaning forward as he spoke, his hands, and the eager look on his face, talking too. There was something of emergency about the feeling they all had in those days of the Fisherman's leave, something of sharpness and danger in the fact that he should in the same moment be so much at home in the house and so much a visitor, that he should be one of them and yet be with them for so short a while. They all lived very sharply, or so it seemed to Barbara Nancy afterwards, during the seven days that the Fisherman was at home, and no time ever seemed so full or went so quickly.

He described to them how he had gone hunting moose with Ben Thomas, the farmer at Foxwarren in Manitoba for whom he worked, and how good moose steak was when

broiled over a fire. He talked a good deal of Trapper Dan, Ben's brother, and told them of the six weeks he had spent with him in the North, going the round of the traps and living in the trapper's hut. Old Ben was good, he said, a bit too good. Old Ben was a Plymouth Brother; you were always on your praying bones with him. But Dan would take him when the war was over and teach him the trapping, the Fisherman said.

"Then you will never marry?" Barbara Nancy said.

"Dan's got a wife and daughter," the Fisherman replied.

What was the daughter like? Everyone spoke at once.

"Plumpish," the Fisherman, after long reflection, said.

"That is no description," his sister objected.

He tried a second time. "Fair. Smiles a lot. Nice teeth. A little nose that's freckled and turns up. Quiet."

"Clever?" Barbara Nancy felt critical all at once.

The Fisherman's brows shot up. "Holy Moses! What would a girl like Melody want to be clever for?"

"Sounds like a black girl, Melody," Plom said.

"She's not black. Melody's as white as milk," his brother said.

Henry was silent. A girl who was white as milk and called Melody sounded, for some reason, very well indeed to him.

Three days before the Fisherman was due to return the Philosopher arrived. No one was greatly surprised. Everyone had known for some time that a last leave was due to him before the seventh battalion of the Royal Worcestershires sailed for France.

At first a certain awkwardness showed itself between the two brothers. It was, everyone felt, like friendliness held back, or a reconciliation that is not quite made. So matters remained between them for a whole day. On the next day the two brothers had gone out together in the morning as carefully as if they had only just met; they returned, Barbara Nancy said, like the three musketeers.

Afterwards the Philosopher related the story of what had

taken place in his own fashion. Looking very large in the low, raftered room, he warmed himself before the fire. "Watch me lick that piece of ceiling," he said by way of preamble to an admiring and critical Plompartay.

He licked the ceiling, then, tilting back on his heels, said: "We met our friend, Miss Mainwaring. The Fish didn't think quite so much of her now that he saw her again. 'You have to see a great many girls before you can properly look at one of 'em,' the Fish said."

"John has been a long way further than Canada to discover that," his father said and laughed.

"Moll had a young man on her arm—oh yes, a soldier. A City Battalion Second Lieutenant. She was too proud to talk to us," the Philosopher explained. "That's a dusty answer to give a fellow," I said. The Fish looked back at her and said: 'She's got legs like a linnet's legs.' He couldn't remember whether she sang. 'After the war I'll have another girl,' I said."

The Philosopher had screwed up his eyes as he spoke in a smile that had just the beginning and the end of something hurt about it still.

The following afternoon the three eldest Furnesses came back from a visit to Lattisforde to find Brock Doddington's Red Indian motor-cycle outside the house.

"Brock is here." Barbara Nancy underlined the fact in faintly proprietorial tones.

Looking almost elegant in a loose grey suit, a red tie and red silk socks, Brock himself came out of the house to meet them.

The young men talked of nothing very much, at first, of common acquaintances, of what each was doing. They did not directly discuss the war. But as they were going into the house Brock spoke as if he felt compelled to speak. "As you both know," he said, "I simply can't square this war with anything else that I believe."

"I don't follow you." The Fisherman regarded him in what the Philosopher described afterwards as a rough pioneering way.

"John Willy declared it was all too darned dim," rather too hastily Barbara Nancy said.

The Philosopher threw himself into a chair. "Is it possible to be altogether right in a war?"

The others looked uncomprehendingly at him.

"As I see it, in time of war you have to choose," he said. "The Fisherman and I found it easy. We'd do what everyone has always done, we thought, and go into all the objections afterwards. But Brock puts the objections first. They have got to be first, I suppose, or last."

No one spoke. As though silence spelt disagreement, "What is the use of talking?" Brock said impatiently. He addressed Barbara Nancy rather stiffly now. "You spoke of your cousin. What is Tamlin doing?"

"Tamlin is in the army. In the K.O.Y.L.I.'s, I think, and somewhere at home still." She shook her head and spoke rather vaguely. "Tamlin is not my proper cousin, you know."

"And you can't say where he is? Doesn't he write even postcards?" Brock said. He spoke softly, but spitefully, she thought.

Soon afterwards he bade them all goodbye. Turning to the two Furness boys, "Good luck," he said.

"I'll see you off," the Philosopher said, going off with him.

But his brother said nothing once more.

When the time came the Fisherman made his goodbyes in the hard, hearty fashion he had brought back with him. To the Philosopher, "I'll look for you over there," he said. His main concern appeared to be for his father. "Take care—look after yourself," he said, the heartiness faltering then. His father had answered him with a steady look. "So long, son." So that difference also was resolved, everyone thought in relief.

Adjusting his Glengarry cap the Fisherman announced confidently then: "We'll get this thing over. Then I'll soon be back."

Robert, now that the Fisherman was no longer there, stayed round the house a great deal. He rearranged his books; he threw all his frayed collars away; he wrote a number of short letters rather slowly; he put a parting in Henry's hair, and, taking a long careful time about it, he pruned, though it was the wrong time for pruning, his Siberian crab tree. And on the last night of his leave he helped to extinguish the fresh fire that had broken out in the ruins of Mrs. Tufton's old house.

The fire had been chiefly notable from the fact that Bridget herself was there, skirting the edge of the flame like a moth, then, like a moth again, heading blindly in. Mr. Amos Tubbs, followed by the Philosopher, had adventured after her. Together they had brought Bridget out, singed and smelling unpleasantly of the fire, and writhing, everyone said unkindly, like a scalded cat. From Bridget's presence at the fire and all the imaginative descriptions of the event that followed, the Tufton scandal that had slept all this while, like the fire, which had smouldered in the foundations of the house all these years, flamed into life once more.

Seth and Ellen, two people who had never been oversensitive to scandal, did not appear very much disturbed. It was different with Brock Doddington. In a bitter and troubled state of mind he attempted to talk the matter over with Margaret.

"No one knows what my grandmother will do next," he said.

"Your grandmother has always responded in a very peculiar fashion to everything that ever happened to her," Margaret replied. Frowning, she laid young Henry's coat, that had lost a button, over a chair.

"How do you mean?" Brock asked patiently.

"As if events were as spiteful as persons, as if there were something malevolent in the world," Margaret said, turning over all the buttons in her work-box as she spoke.

"And isn't there?" Brock waited.

"Perhaps. But it is all very impersonal," Margaret said. She spoke coldly. She leaned back in her chair. Not all the love she had had for Anna could prevent her from feeling indifferent towards Anna's son, or, nowadays, from thinking constantly: When so many other young men are in danger, what right has he to be so safe?

"Oh," Brock said. He had a politely insolent way of saying "Oh." Soon afterwards he excused himself—no one could blame him for that, Margaret felt—and went away.

He came back again the same evening to find Edward alone.

He touched the lapel of his coat as he came in and spoke. "Someone sent me this: my first."

Edward Furness looked at the white feather. "Do you have to wear it?"

"I suppose not. I rather hoped I might meet the person who sent it." Brock took the feather from his coat and smoothed it slowly between his fingers. "Do you feel it is everyone's duty to take part in this war? Do you feel it is so simple to make up one's mind?"

Edward knocked out his pipe, then held it in one hand. "All the complications are on your side, aren't they? This decision of yours, when you come to it, won't do more than it sets out to do. It won't solve any of your private problems that need solving, if that is what you are thinking. You will make one more soldier if you change your mind, one more conscientious objector if you remain of the same opinion still. If you don't change,"—he looked up—"can you bear all the loneliness—it comes to that—of going against the current? In one sense, I daresay you can. In another, no. For you are asserting yourself a little, aren't you, in this whole business? There's no harm in that. At first it's natural

enough. But it won't last, it won't carry you all the way. You must see that. Young men of your sort who begin by going against society often end up by being at war with themselves."

Brock spoke obstinately after a moment. "I know," he said. "I've thought of that. But I can't change now. I must be consistent, I must go on until I feel impelled to turn back, until I see things clear."

"In that case I can't help you. I'm sorry," Edward said, and he leaned over and chose a fresh pipe from the rack, and blew down it. "I wish someone would send me some feathers," he said.

After taking his leave, Brock walked on past the turning to the end of the village and the river. His thoughts, as always when he was troubled, were cloudy and vague, were even a trifle sentimental. It was a great deal not to be condemned, a great deal to be addressed reasonably; it was worth even more to be made aware of so much kindness. All this in Edward Furness appeared to him to supply one more reason for wishing one day to marry Barbara Nancy. For I do wish to marry her ultimately, don't I? he asked. Ever since I was ten or eleven I have thought of marrying her. Partly in order to have her with me always, partly in order to be one of the Furnesses. But they disapprove of me, obviously they disapprove. And I am not fanatical enough or strong-minded enough to win any kind of understanding for myself even from them. If one feels strongly enough about anything, one can always win respect for one's opinions; one can almost always, to a certain extent, be approved. But I am never positive enough: neither hot nor cold, I am always something tepid between. Made sharply aware of his own dissatisfaction, he walked more quickly.

The sky was softly lit; the ivy leaves shone darkly; his feet trod on the fine mesh of the shadows. The moon, followed by a star or two, slid from one cloud-cover to the

next; the fields darkened and lightened; the trails of black bryony in the hedge seemed to grope and feel for the wind. The river, scarcely heard in the daytime, was a continuous low murmur now; a small stream ran very clear and separate and cool beside the hedge. The whole of it is vast, it's impersonal, Brock thought. It's perfect, too perfect. And I am the only one, I feel, out of tune, out of touch. The Furnesses are right, of course. I am separate, I am cut off from other people. More and more the war possesses people's lives, it dictates their feelings, it changes the direction of their thoughts, it comes between a man and his friends; it comes between even the Furnesses and myself. The war both possesses people and belongs to people. It is their war, they feel. I can't feel that it belongs to me.

Overwhelmed by a momentary feeling of helplessness he stood still. At this point on the brow of the hill a spring gushed out of the bank into a small semi circular stone drinking-trough; on the other side the road dropped steeply into what seemed a pit of darkness under close-packed overhanging trees. Quite suddenly he was aware of the darkness and his own thoughts; quite suddenly, without being afraid, he was aware of fear on the other side of the dark. Never once, he realized, when alone and at night, had he gone further than this. People who had once been afraid of the dark, it was said, never quite lost their fear. He looked behind him. Perhaps all fear is like that, he thought, perhaps fear is only another self, a man's second shadow.

As he waited, half-afraid in a childish fashion, and ashamed and watchful of his own fear, the sound of the spring came to him from close at hand, tranquil and cool, a constant flow. Away on his left the river was a deep current of sound; overhead the tops of the trees lifted to a slight swaying rhythm; underfoot the shadows moved and crept. As suddenly as it had come the acute self-consciousness under which he laboured left him. Once more it was as

if the trees and the wind moved in a world apart from men; once more it was almost as if the wind were in league with the trees.

He laid his hand on the edge of the trough into which the water from the spring fell. It was moss-covered, rough, and—even in this pale light—green with weed. Like a child again, he put a finger experimentally under the first welling out of the spring. At once it grew icy-cold. He withdrew his hand. There's a way everything must take, he told himself—one's thoughts, one's feelings, water flowing, the wind. To accept? Was that the secret? Never to resist? Or to resist always? Were there no rules for living? Did every man in his heart make his own rules?

He turned. It was the same world before him still: the pale splendour of light, the infinity of space, the tall trees, the ebb and flow of the shadows. I am myself, he thought, I shall never be anything but myself: separate, and doubting, and afraid.

Squaring his shoulders a little, a trick he had unconsciously cultivated of late, he made for home.

Without warning, or so it seemed again, the Philosopher was gone. He said none of the ordinary things: nothing about writing, or being back soon, nothing of what he would do when he returned. As for what he thought—no one could ever tell what the Philosopher thought. But at the last moment, when the local train began to get into a fuss and the engine with the brass top began to throw out pillars of vapour into the faces of all the people who were waiting, he had leaned out of the carriage window. "Take care of *her*," he had said to Barbara Nancy, a certain gravity in his voice. And: "Plom, you can have my football boots," he had said. Almost immediately he had withdrawn again, and the snow—it had snowed that morning already—began to fall softly, relentlessly once more, the snow dots streaking the window panes, coming with a kind of finality between

Barbara Nancy and Henry and the Philosopher's face. Even as Barbara Nancy looked away the train moved off; a moment later the Philosopher was gone.

All the way home, the silence of the falling snow about them, Barbara Nancy felt no wish to speak, and Henry was silent too. Already the field was white, pierced with the green spikes of the grass blades; the boughs of the trees were as though enlarged and straitly furred; there was not a gleam anywhere, scarcely a footprint, not a shadow, and in the distance the river lay smooth and still.

It was heavy and empty in the house now that both the Philosopher and the Fisherman were gone, as if—everyone felt it—you waited against all reason for the latch to lift, the door knob to turn. The clock ticked, the ash flaked into the hearth, and no one came, only absence, Barbara Nancy thought, slipping in like a shadow, like a shadow slipping out once more.

Until close on midnight the snow did not cease to fall. By that time it had settled deep. You could feel it pressing silently against window-panes and doors; you could feel how deep it was from the snow silence and the blue whiteness when the moon came up on the white walls. The stars were out, scrolled and signatured and patterned thick on the unshadowed blue of sky. Who would think it was the same sky that only a few hours since showed yellow-grey? Frost was painful, frost always seemed like pain, but to-night under the snow there was stillness, quiet, no feeling of pain; and in the stillness the birds, feathers ruffled for warmth, slept on the heavy boughs.

Barbara Nancy turned in the bed. For all that she was sleepy and warm, a vague troubled awareness kept her this side of sleep. Images and recollections succeeded each other fast on the drowsy curtain of her mind. She saw the Fisherman's trim figure, the dark blue eyes under the straight brows. He leaned over what appeared to be the head of the bed and looked at her. Now the Philosopher came into the

room. She sensed rather than saw the slow turn of his head, the slow, deepening smile. His hands, shapely, capable, square, were in hers suddenly. And that, she felt at once, since Robert and she were not usually demonstrative one to the other, was strange. She held and smoothed his hands. "Your hands are like my hands. But mine are small," she said. Quite suddenly again the two of them were gone. Now Brock Doddington came, walking quickly and nervously on to the dark screen of her mind. He had, she was certain, something he wished to say. She waited. He did not speak. Instead, poet-fashion, he tossed back a lock of hair. It was an impatient gesture, nervously tense, like his walk, like the upward jerk of one foot, when, legs crossed, he sat and talked. Disconcertingly, once more walking quickly, he too was gone. A long procession of fir trees appeared now, moving swiftly before her eyes, and the rose-grey dusk that always lives in a fir wood seemed to her to lie between. She opened her eyes. Some people dream of water, I always dream of trees.

She felt herself thinking coherently in the next moment: the others came, I wish Tamlin had come with them. But now a new sound of marching feet, and men's voices, broke in on the sleepy irrelevance of her mind. Completely awake, she sat up in the bed.

The voices of the men of the third battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment returning from night manœuvres came to her now, rollicking and careless and gay over the snow. "Hullo, hullo," they sang, "who's your lady friend, Who's the little girlie by your side?" She listened as the voices drew nearer and the song rose and swelled and came to an end. Then, with scarcely a pause, to the wheeze of the mouth-organs and the slither and stamp of their own feet, they began differently again. "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave," they sang, coming nearer still, their voices ringing out from under her window, "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave, but his soul

goes marching on. Glory, glory, hallelujah," they sang, "His soul goes marching on."

In an anguish of feeling that was new to her and full of fear she cried after them then in her mind: "Oh, where are you going? Where? Where?" No answer came. Still singing, the young men swung past, between the trees, round the white curve of the road, out of sight. And it seemed to her as she strained forward to listen that the Philosopher and the Fisherman, and many thousands more whom she did not know nor would ever know, went with them.

Gradually once more, as she waited and listened still, the snow quiet closed up again and soft as snow itself lay upon everything.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FORTUNES OF WAR

THE front windows of the Fortunes of War looked on Market Street and the grey tower of the church and a row of pollarded chestnut trees. As the church clock began to strike the hour the sash window of one of the topmost rooms of the inn flew up and a little man in shirt and braces, with a very red face, a carbuncled nose, and a fluff of white hair round a tonsured head, hung out, then, with a gesture of annoyance, dashed down the sash once more, so that the lace curtains vibrated, the wooden acorn on the blind cord swung dizzily.

"No sense of time, none," old Beeston complained aloud, not for the first time, to the empty parlour. Once more he arranged the neat strips of agenda papers in order round the long polished table. On an afterthought he rushed to the opposite window that looked out on the cobbled court-

yard. "I thought as much," he said, and, flinging open the door, so that the white card inscribed in large letters, "Sigbarrow and Alne Saddle and Harness Makers Limited," lurched sideways on its green cord, he sped downstairs.

Words of command could clearly be heard coming, it seemed, from the other side of the bay tree in the centre of the yard—"Atten-shun! Stand-at-Hease!"—all in the roaring parade-ground voice of Sergeant John Christopher, late of His Majesty's Grenadier Guards. Edward Furness, though he was aware that Beeston at this moment was speeding in search of him, nevertheless paused to listen, something he never failed to do at this hour when Sergeant John Christopher held his parade and Beeston summoned the directors of the Sigbarrow and Alne Saddle and Harness Makers to their quarterly meeting. "Quick-march!" came the command at last—it was for this that he had been waiting. At once the starlings on the roof-top flew up in a whirl of wings, and the four little Christophers—the Sergeant had married late—Edwina, Georgina, Charlottina, and Roberta, marching like guardsmen, came into view round the bay tree. All were in black alpaca frocks and white starched pinafores and black button boots; each one boasted a broad middle parting and two tight pigtails tied with black ribbons. All the little girls had solemn wooden faces and tight pear-drop mouths—all except Roberta, who was the smallest and the youngest and who therefore came last. Roberta's round china-blue eyes spoke fury in spite of the tear smudges on her cheeks; even her tight, tow-coloured plaits appeared to crackle defiance.

"What has Roberta done?" Edward Furness addressed Charlottina when the squad had been dismissed and Roberta had fled past him under the archway and into the street.

Scarlatina, for so everyone in the town called her, turned her toes in virtuously and looked down at them, then looked up and spoke in a hushed voice: "She said to him, Roberta said, when he chastised her for going to the circus, 'Dee

you,' Roberta said, 'hit me again and I'll go and be a water-baby.'"

Edward Furness laughed into a large white pocket handkerchief. He took the handkerchief away. "And now what will happen?"

"Four strokes of the flat of his hand on the buttocks," Scarlatina said, whispering, "and four days confined to barracks."

Laughing still, Edward Furness went on into the Fortunes of War.

Presently everyone except Seth Doddington had arrived in the committee room. There was Ted Unwin, who was yellow-faced and short of breath and given to sleeping even at committee meetings and to making odd and surprising remarks on waking. He lived alone with a great many grandfather clocks and dusty cases of china and a Sealyham bitch called Rosie. There was Joe Smithson, who acted as commercial traveller for the firm. He was heavily built, with a surprisingly small nose and an equally surprisingly vast forehead. His wife had left him just before the outbreak of war. She had gone on a visit to friends in Australia and had only written home once, and then it was to say: "I like this place. No more little Sigbarrow for me." Since that time, Smithson, and it was easy to understand, everyone said very sympathetically, had not been the same man. From being a stiff, sober sort of fellow he had turned somewhat cynical and gross. Miller Chapman was there too. He wore his best breeches of grey cord, and a gold albert stretched across his chest, and a silver watch ticking inside his pocket as audibly as any clock.

"They're running races," Unwin said suddenly, "Miller's watch and the Grandad." He nodded to the grandfather clock in the corner, then shut his eyes and folded his hands on his chest and prepared to doze just as Beeston laid hold of the red minute-book.

The miller had just been heard promising Edward Furness

twelve dozen new School Catechisms for all the children in the school. "That'll make the poor kids happy, that will, I know," Smithson said in a loud whisper to Unwin, who opened one eye and looked at him with the impersonal malevolence of a bird.

"Order, order," Beeston said, and he began straightway to read the minutes in a high nasal voice.

Just as Edward Furness, who was in the chair, was signing the minutes, Rosie the Sealyham barked loudly.

"That's him," Smithson said, looking round. "Funny things, bitches," he said, looking at Rosie now.

Seth walked in. He hung up his hat, he apologized blandly for being late, he put a thumb in the pocket of his camel-hair waistcoat and sat down. "All about little Moll," he said indulgently, stretching out his neat gaitered legs under the table and towards the fire.

"Item four on the agenda she is," Beeston corrected him.

"Item four then," Seth said.

"And she don't want to leave us. I can't understand that, I must say, such a lively piece as she is," Smithson remarked.

"Brassy I'd call her." Beeston spoke in shaky suppressed tones.

"We'll have the statement first," Edward Furness said.

Beeston read the statement. Moll Mainwaring—it was Moll who was up for judgment—was accused, in Beeston's indictment, "of having been absent from duty in this office without permission being asked or consent given; of cohabiting for three days and nights with a man not her husband at the Goat and Compasses, Henrietta Street, Birmingham, and of being insolent and insubordinate when spoken to by secretary Beeston.

"Insolent? How?" Seth inquired in interested tones.

"We'll have that too," the chairman said.

Beeston swallowed bravely. "She said I was a dried-up

old beanstalk and a Bible-thumper. She said she'd have left long ago if it hadn't been for Unwin here and the chairman, but she wasn't leaving now without a character whatever we said, or she'd have the law on me and damages. That was what she said, and enough too." Beeston looked dourly about him.

"What a wench!" Smithson marvelled.

"Move, Mr. Chairman, we do nothing about any of it," Unwin said.

"Why not ask the girl to resign?" Seth said, balancing one foot on top of another.

"She's a nice m'lady and always has been," Beeston said.

"Well, make up your minds," the chairman said. "We've no evidence against her that can be called evidence." He waited.

"We don't know a thing for certain, that's right," Smithson said.

"You'll know soon enough." Here Miller and Beeston exchanged prophetic looks, and Rosie, as though inflamed by the general suppressed excitement, stirred suddenly from beneath Unwin's feet and nipped the miller's heel.

"She wants to go out," Unwin said. He took her out.

"No dogs in committee rooms, that ought to be the rule," Miller observed fiercely while disdaining to rub his heel.

"Would it do if I spoke to the girl?" the chairman said. Almost at once everyone agreed.

No sooner was the meeting over than Seth excused himself and hurried away. Everyone else strolled to the window overlooking the street. Five minutes afterwards—it was for this that they were waiting—Sergeant Christopher himself came in carrying seven glasses of port on a tray before him.

"Seth's gone," he was told.

"Ah." He set the tray down on the table in a meaning fashion and each man took a glass. "Not too comfortable he isn't, I know," he said, "with the tribunal sitting in this very room in a fortnight's time to examine some of the

young men's consciences. The scrimshankers. Seth's got his own boy in mind, no doubt of it," the Sergeant said. "I'd examine 'em. Good and sharp. My Roberta's got more guts. I'll examine her too—when I catch her. But will it make an ounce o' difference? It will not," the Sergeant said, shaking his head proudly and lifting his glass. "Well, here's to the tribunal!"

"It must make 'em laugh in Germany, my word it must, to see us over here playing about with conscription still," Smithson said, and he rolled his wine around on his tongue as he spoke. "Why don't we go in for this war in real earnest? That is what I should like to know. What are we waiting for? But no, we got to throw away a good many young men's lives first before we know our own minds. Looks like it. That's being a peace-loving people, that is. Well, you pay for it. Or they do, the young men, I mean. When it comes to a war, it's safer to be a bullet-headed, bullet-eating Prussian than a long-headed, cricket-playing Englishman. You live longer. There's not half so many lives thrown away for nothing on their side. Our chaps nearly did what they set out to do at Gallipoli, from what I hear from some that was there, our chaps and the Anzacs, I mean o' course. Didn't they? Nearly. They got out on the top of the ridge, and there it all was, open before 'em, the Promised Land, you might say, and they have to turn back. They'd got no maps, and the reinforcements have got lost, and it's morning and too late. So it's just another big bit o' glory for us and eighty or ninety thousand good men gone, and that's all. Christ, did you ever hear such a game?" Smithson said. "We ought to have had conscription from the very first day war broke out and three years before that. I said so at the time and I say so now. Share and share alike, I said. And not so much waste o' young men's lives. They take some rearin', the sort o' men we're losing do. Not that it matters to me, I've got no children," Smithson said. He went on as quickly as before, only

pausing to set down his glass. "I met young Doddington the other day. 'What's your regiment going to be?' I asked him. He looks down his nose at me and waits. Real Oxford now, I said to myself. It was the timber yard t'other day. 'I'm a C.O.,' he says as proud as if he was in the Household Cavalry. 'Oh, I see,' I said, 'Bunyan's Own. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress,' I said. 'Anything you like,' he says, and he looks at me. If I hadn't been taken right aback, he would have had a piece of my mind. He's got eyes like a woman, that young man has," Smithson said. "Don't know that I ever noticed 'em before."

Edward Furness turned from the window. He had been listening with only half his mind. A waste of life, Smithson had said. Most people were not so articulate. With most people realization thrust deeper. It made men and women dumb so that they could not speak. Like starvation, realization in the end brought only a strange numbing of the mind. Twenty years hence we shall say what we only feel now; we shall be bitter twenty years hence, he thought.

"Why not leave the lad be? There's no harm in him. And as for Bunyan's Own, Bunyan fought—he fought both ways, if I remember rightly," he said. Bunyan fought with the sword of his right arm and with the sword of the spirit, he thought, but did not say. He stayed silent. Like all egotists, Brock was logical. Violence was still violence to him, and killing, if it was not murder, yet resembled murder.

"It might be fairer," he said finally, "if there were men of military age on these tribunals. I don't know sometimes what right we older men have to send young men to a war."

No one agreed.

"We had to put up with what came to us. Why shouldn't they do the same? Every dog has his day," Smithson said.

"I've done my bit of fighting," the Sergeant said.

"It's all a great waste of money," Miller declared fretfully.

Well, he wouldn't be in any young man's shoes,

Edward Furness said. Lifting his stick and his hat upon it from the hook on the door, he bade them goodbye.

He walked slowly towards Alne. Every now and then someone passed, and he lifted his hat of grey cloth in acknowledgment or waved his stick. He knew everyone; everyone knew him. In thirty years one could make an army of acquaintances, if not of friends. But the majority of those whom he met now were elderly people. England never seemed to him so old a country as now, in February of 1916, with pretty well nine-tenths of her young men in uniform or gone oversea. Since August 1914 it was as though the weather had changed, as if the weather in the soul—that was some writer's phrase—were always grey. This war of attrition with its constant fret of casualties was doubly hard to bear. Battles on the western front lasted for days, for weeks even. The German attacks on Verdun still raged, though the French were almost exhausted and February was almost gone.

There were times when Edward Furness, in common with other men of his age, found it difficult to separate the anxiety he felt for his own sons from the general anxiety he felt at the course of the war; there were times even when he could not distinguish very clearly between his concern for John or Robert and his much smaller concern for Tamlin or for John's boys and for John James. The war was the same war; they were all in it; a man was anxious for them all. John James was at sea, John's sons were scattered; Tamlin, having survived Gallipoli, John said (for Tamlin himself had not written), was in France.

He swung his stick, then raised it once more in salute. The postman turned on his bicycle as he passed and looked back as though there was something he wished but did not quite care, to say. Postman Gales was an old soldier himself, and the letters he brought to the house from Robert or John Furness were human documents to him. He appeared to feel a personal relief when he delivered letters and post-

cards from either battle front addressed in familiar handwriting. "He's safe. You've got a letter," or, "Look, you've got a postcard," he would say. In these days, when every house had a man at the war, he was more like a doctor going his sick rounds, leaving cheerfulness in this house, sorrow in that, than a staunch member of his union carrying out his official duties in His Majesty's uniform.

From Postman Gales's air of expectation and uneasiness there was certainly a letter, perhaps even an uncommon sort of letter, for the Furness family. It could wait, Edward Furness decided. He was not easily ruffled nor easily alarmed. Nevertheless, unconsciously he quickened his pace. The wind that met him now had a keener edge; there were green lights and tender grey shadows on the hills; the air was shining and clear as he had known it in the North on a day in spring. He was within sight of the house now, and Postman Gales, zigzagging a little wearily on his bicycle, was mounting the slope not more than a hundred yards away. A letter—it appeared to be a letter—had been taken out from the pile Gales had in his hand, had been turned over once or twice in a doubtful fashion, then dropped, as though reluctantly, into the letter-box.

Having arrived at the house Edward Furness also turned the letter over in his hand several times before taking it nearer the light. It was from France, addressed in a strange hand, in a plain envelope, signed in the bottom left-hand corner, Cecil Brailes, Captain. On reading the letter he felt nothing for a moment unless it was a vague and infinitely painful credulity: this is what we feared; this is what, almost, I knew. He stayed for what was a long time without moving in the warm firelit room, while outside the light grew more grey, then was lost in the sun's gold. Gradually, realization flowed in. So this that they had always known might come to them, to them also, was here. It was their burden; it was sorrow and pride for them in their turn now. Missing, believed wounded, the letter said. It lay on the polished

table; the envelope he still held in one hand. How much hope? he asked now. How much? He moved to the hearth-rug and looked down at the fire. Missing, believed wounded on the western front, his mind went again. Round Ypres, that would be. The Philosopher had always been at Ypres. Suddenly his father remembered how the Philosopher had stood where he was standing now. "Watch me lick that beam," he had said not much more than a year ago to an admiring but sceptical Henry.

Emotion, sudden and sharp, invaded Edward Furness then. Where are you now? Where? his mind asked. And then: How shall I tell her? His thoughts were not measured nor coherent. In grief a man is unlike himself, unrecognizable even to himself. Gradually heaviness mounted in him. He sat bowed as if under a burden, and waited. The room grew dark, the shadows from the fire leapt like greyhounds upon the wall, and still Margaret did not come.

The news that Robert Furness had been posted as missing, since the Furnesses could scarcely bring themselves to speak of it, spread only slowly through Sigbarrow and Alne. Brock Doddington, who arrived in Alne unexpectedly on the following Saturday, had not heard. And Ellen, though the fact was very present in her mind, took pains to be silent. She was tamed and sleek now, yet she kept a certain residual malice which served her, as malice always does, in place of better things. In spite of her dislike of her nephew, she was a little jealous that he should come to Alne so often, solely, she was convinced, on account of his fondness for the Furnesses and not at all out of any consideration for his father and herself. Let him find out, or let his friends tell him, she thought, with a snap of her eyes that were as much like Anna's eyes as the dark pebbles at the bottom of a stream are like the deep water that flows over them. Or so Brock thought, for he was somewhat over-steeped in the poets, and he got up from his chair and looked at his aunt

with a dislike that even she could feel, and, without speaking to her, walked away.

Ellen turned angry after he had gone. "He will never forgive us, never," she declared to Seth. "Anna never forgave us either. Anna never really forgave anyone."

If only she would not bring all that up again, Seth said wearily.

"You will never face up to anything," Ellen said.

"And a woman who treads in another woman's shoes will never be content either," Seth, not so wearily this time, said.

Left to herself, Ellen wept furiously, a duster in her hand. She remembered Anna once more, and thought for the first time how difficult life was, and, vaguely, how unsatisfactory love was, and wept again.

Unaware of the minor storm he had provoked Brock went on his way to the Furnesses. To-day there was no room for any thought of his father or his Aunt Ellen in his mind. What have they to do with me? he had asked himself long ago. They have chosen each other; all the more, therefore, I belong to myself. For he too was possessive and jealous, though in a quite different fashion. His mother's death was still something which he could not forgive, which he tried to forget. Only now and then he felt bitterly: I could have talked to her, I could have made her understand. Or, more rarely: we might have been happy together; as she grew older she would have found some sort of quiet, she would have grown more content. He would sometimes be reminded of her by some revealing trait in himself, even by some chance reflection of himself in a mirror. Once or twice his father had looked at him in a hurt, a remembering, and yet an oddly incredulous fashion. There is something in me that reminds him of her, Brock had guessed. He had felt hard and unpleasant then, even a little triumphant. Go on suffering, what did you expect? he had thought.

He had dismissed his father and his Aunt Ellen from his

mind. He could not so easily dismiss the war. He was still honest in his hatred of violence, in his dread of violence. Both appeared less personal to him now. The war itself had become less personal. As it spread wider, as it touched more and still more lives, it appeared to him at last as the immense, the slow, annihilating thing it was. Though he stood outside it still, he was no longer so content to be outside. His preoccupation with the war was the measure of his own dissatisfaction with himself. Only those who are in this war can begin to forget it, he would think. To stand outside this war is like living outside one's century. Tolerance—everyone had been surprisingly tolerant—had somewhat taken the sharp edge from his conscience. No one in this country will martyr me, he had thought, half-ironical, even half-resentful of the fact. Even now that conscription appeared certain he could not feel very greatly concerned for himself. I should be anxious or at least apprehensive; instead I am merely curious. Almost it is as though I were waiting for something to happen in my own mind. At the moment, indeed, I know I am still free. Free, that is, to go on, or to change my mind. Barbara Nancy would say I am free because of other men's efforts: there's some truth in that, of course. He remained cheerfully unconcerned.

His mind, in fact, was on a different, a more ordinary and frivolous plane to-day. All the days were alike. Then, suddenly, something within oneself changed. After that one's whole life changed, as though some process within oneself that had been at work for months, perhaps for years, were at last complete. It was like that with him now. I'm in love, he thought, a little; no, not a little, a great deal. Perhaps for that reason everything he saw that afternoon delighted him: the buds on the elm trees showing purple against the blue of sky, the iridescent sheen on a starling's wings, the faint rainbow-coloured wisps of cloud. For he would see her, he thought—he would see Barbara Nancy,

he would be able to tell her something of what was passing in his mind.

As he came in to the Furnesses' house the smell of the bees-wax polish Mrs. Fairey had used that morning greeted him and the scent of apple-wood burning on the fire. Edward Furness looked up when he came in, then took his pipe from his mouth, waved it, and, without speaking, put it back again.

There was something heavy and unwonted about the gesture which cut short Brock's eagerness. He said nevertheless, for the words were already almost out of his mouth: "I've heard you spoke up for me at the Fortunes of War, sir. I am grateful. I do thank you." He stopped short then.

"I merely told them to leave you be," Edward Furness said.

"They will never do that." Brock sounded almost proud. He halted and spoke impulsively. "You don't look well, sir. I suppose—I suppose it is this damned war." He looked away. "Really, I wished to see Barbara Nancy," he said.

"You can see her later." Edward Furness looked at the young man. "I suppose you quarrel?" half-quizzically but with an obvious effort, he said.

At once Brock experienced an immense relief. It was like me to be over-fearful, to imagine there was something wrong. "She has got a temper," he said regretfully. "Though a stranger would never suspect it of her. And she finds me a very annoying person at times as well."

"And are you?"

Brock smiled, a sudden gravity about his smile. "Yes, of course." I love her, he thought. Quite suddenly he was at his ease.

He turned to go. "Remember me to Robert. I hope he's well."

Edward Furness laid his pipe carefully upon a chair. "He's missing," he said. He stood up then.

"I didn't know. Could no one tell me?" Brock could hear the sharpness in his own voice. His immediate concern was for the Furnesses. Underneath was something sharper, his involuntary concern for himself. Just when I am pleased with everything and fairly tumbling over myself, I am brought up short like this, his mind went.

Egotism and concern spoke together. "I'm sorry," he said.

"They pay, and we pay," Edward Furness said. With a gesture of dismissal he came with the young man to the door.

On an impulse Brock spoke again, his voice sharp once more with concern for himself. "And I pay nothing, that is what you think, that is what you all think." Do they blame me? he asked still bitterly. Almost he blamed himself. I am against everyone in this, and everyone, whether they wish it or not, he told himself, his mind racing, is against me.

"I am sorry," he said again. "I am very sorry I spoke as I did." He looked and spoke only miserably now.

"I didn't think of you. Why should I?" Edward Furness said. Quietly, without any discourtesy at all, he shut the door.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RIVER ONCE MORE

It was a late Saturday afternoon, and the deep scars left by the timber trolleys were filled with brown water now. The trolleys had gone, taking most of the beech trees with them—for army saddles, Rannock, the head timberman, had said. "We'll ha' to pull 'er down, and 'er," he had declared a few weeks ago, marking each tree with a cross in white chalk and a blaze of his axe. Even the trees must

go, Barbara Nancy had thought. They had been symbols to her of changelessness; now they themselves were changed. Only the saplings, bending in every movement of wind, were left, and a tangle of undergrowth, a few chestnut trees, a few limes. Yet for all the wreckage of boughs a stir could be felt in the wood. Lime twigs were scarlet, there were faint bluenesses like wood smoke about the hollows, and the hills where the sun's light lingered were a shout of green, and dusk was velvety, soft, lengthening into spring. And the third winter of the war was almost gone.

In the lane outside the wood dusk came closer, shot with the sun's light as though dusky with pollen, dusky, Barbara Nancy thought, with catkin gold. She passed the Doddingtons' house. Here, as always since Ellen had been mistress, were the hens pricking about inside the open door, and a cat asleep on the white window-ledge of the kitchen sink. As she passed Brock came out of the house towards her.

"We always meet here," he said, and paused.

"Not always." She remembered their last meeting. They had met soon after the news that the Philosopher was missing had reached them. "I must talk to you. I must," Brock had said, coming out on that occasion also from the house. "Not now," she had answered. She had felt queerly hard and unsmiling, in no mood for confidences or comfort. And she had been—perhaps this most of all—unwilling to talk to Brock Doddington. All that Robert cared for is nothing to him, she had thought, hearing the trumpets, far-off and clear, treading for a moment with the Philosopher the high peaks of sacrifice. "No, not now," she had said again, hastily, and she had crossed over to the other side.

Afterwards she had reproached herself. She had not been able to reproach herself a great deal. I ought not to dramatize any occasion, I ought not to strike attitudes, I ought not to shine in reflected glory, she had thought. No more than that.

"Did you feel sorry?" Brock asked, coming along beside her now, "that last time?"

"Yes. A little." She looked at him. "Because we have always been friends," she said.

"I thought so." He drew a deep breath of relief. "You see"—he waved—"I had just hit on something new about myself, I had to tell it to you, only to you, and that, partly, is why I have come back."

He broke off, and Mrs. Tubbs, watching from behind the block of geraniums in her window on the corner, waited curiously for the young man to begin speaking again; and while she waited, her cat, a gilded tortoiseshell, lit on the heavy round clump of wormwood at her door.

"I say, there's everybody looking at us, everybody staring," Brock said, staring himself, first at Mrs. Tubbs sitting impassive in her window, then finally into the velvet green and topaz eyes of the cat. "Let's go by the river, shall we?"

They made their way slowly over the fields towards the river. "I want to explain. At length. Will you listen? Will you be patient?" Brock asked.

"I only crossed over to the other side once; I only snubbed you once." Barbara Nancy was reproachful for a moment. She laughed then.

"You can't realize," Brock said, looking at her very affectionately for a moment, then at once plunging on—"of course, I don't believe any Furness can—that I had to do something, I had to assert myself in face of this war. How pompous that sounds! But the war took me unawares. It uncovered a great deal in me that I had hidden. It reached back to the beginning of things. It went foundation-deep with me. Not only with me, I know. But I hated it at sight. It seemed to me like a mass revelation of all the things, all the feelings I had struggled against all my life. It was new, horribly new, and yet it was recognizably the same. Can you understand?" He waited.

"I think so. And now?" Barbara Nancy spoke slowly.

"I don't feel like that any longer. The two things are joined in my mind; the struggle in me and the struggle outside me appear like one struggle now. The war hasn't changed. It's the same evil, it feels the same. But I've changed." He paused and spoke more quietly. "You'll never guess, but quite suddenly I've come to see that by accepting all the things you hate and fear, if you are so unlucky as to hate and fear anything, you can face them. In the end perhaps you can fight and conquer them, or at least never be conquered by them." He paused again. He looked at her. "Do I sound too serious? Or bilious, as Henry used to say. You remember?"

"Yes," she said. They laughed together then, and Brock, sobering once more, went on. "You know what our house was like when I was a child, how there was some sort of deep conflict as well as a kind of love—love isn't made up of one kind of feeling, of course, but a whole mass of feelings—between my grandmother and my mother. You know how my grandmother ruled everyone in the house, how she ruled even my father, so that he always chose the easiest way out. Because of her I never had any kind of mental peace or freedom. Freedom to a child means happiness, room to grow, doesn't it? A long procession of days in which you are never afraid. I was afraid for my mother always, and through her for myself—afraid that she would be distressed by something or someone, that she would leave me, that I shouldn't have her any longer. That last fear, at least, was real." Brock gesticulated, and was silent, then went on once more. "I had a queer sense of guilt even then that preyed upon me, a sense of being different from other children, because my mother was a love child, and a tramp's child at that. And my grandmother was always there with her strange moods and the compulsion, part physical, part mental, that she put upon me, that I think she puts upon almost everyone. She hated me, I believe; I was a disappointment to her, you see—

people always hate their disappointments. I know I detested her. In order to escape I made my own world in that crazy house. But the world I imagined was haunted also. You see, it had to be modelled on my real world since that was the only world I knew." He paused once more and was quiet for a moment, then went on again. "When I least expect it, something of the same kind of fear I felt in those days touches me and paralyses me again. Not fear so much as a sudden trembling. Physical fear, mental fear—fear is all one, isn't it? I don't believe I am a physical coward really, though incidentally that doubt also is something I may never be able to resolve. It is more a habit of timidity in my case, I think. All sorts of things make me afraid still: water at night, sudden noises, deep stains of shadow. But all this is too long a story. And it is getting a shade literary as well. I can so often hear myself talking, as they say, like a book. I know now that I have got to escape, by some means, from this old world of my imagination into a new world of—of normality, if you like. At least I must try." He frowned, then went on simply. "It all comes to this: I feel I want to get deep into the war and suffer it in myself, and in some way, for it doesn't matter which way, come through. Either way, I tell myself, there will be a kind of freedom for me. Like myself in the whirlpool, only more happily, I hope. Again it may look like a repetition of things, like something of the same pattern recurring again. But it is quite simple really." He looked at her. "Does all this burden you?"

Barbara Nancy shook her head.

"Of course I want you to think well of me," Brock said on a different note. "I want your father to think well of me too. Your father most of all. Because in a way you would always like me a little, wouldn't you? Whatever I did?"

She looked at him clearly. "I don't think Furnesses ought to come into it."

"No, they ought not." Brock sounded relieved. "But they do, you know. You are the only person to whom I have ever spoken in this way, to whom I could ever speak. And I could not have spoken to you in this way, not even to you, a little while ago. Like everything else, you have always been there, the only lovely thing." He stopped short then, and flushed darkly. Barbara Nancy made a faint quick movement of dissent. "Don't mind that I say so, don't try to prevent me," he said. "And please don't ever be sorry for me. I should hate that. One other thing" —he laughed as he spoke—"I'm relieved that the famous tribunal of the local worthies will not, after all, have my case to consider in the Fortunes of War. I'm glad I've saved myself that."

Everything that happened to Brock was like a circle, it occurred to Barbara Nancy suddenly, the two ends of which were drawing together now. Invaded by half a dozen different misgivings she waited.

Smiling at her quite cheerfully then, Brock said: "Perhaps I ought to write novels. The tormented, self-revealing kind."

He stooped, picked up a stick and waved it. "Let's go look at the river," he said.

When they reached the timber yard, "Not this gate," he said. He led the way past the main entrance to the yard along the line of the hedge. "There used to be a hole here. I always came through it if I could." He found the hole, a pleased secret look on his face. "One very good thing about this part of the world is that fences are seldom or never mended, gaps in hedges are seldom or never filled in." Still talking, he handed Barbara Nancy through the gap. Among the dead timber and the standing trees he became silent once more.

They came over the patch of green where the grindstone stood to the river. It was shining and alive, like a great fish or a water-snake under the shadows. The first star, now faint like a pin-point in the clouds, now lost in them, was

faint and lost too in the water. A white shape, three grey shapes—the swan and her three cygnets—rode past, skirting the bright reflection of the star.

Brock touched Barbara Nancy's elbow, then held it. Together they came away, only to pause a second time before the burned-out ruins of what had once been the Tuftons' house. Still holding Barbara Nancy's arm Brock pressed nearer. The white steps cut out of the bank leading from the wood to the garden showed plainly in the dusk, and from the heart of the shell that had been the house they could hear the sound of the spring welling under the stones.

"Was it here, do you think, the tramp came, looking for my grandmother?" Brock said. "I've often wondered. Would anyone know?"

"Mrs. Fairey might," Barbara Nancy replied.

"This place has a queer fascination for me still, though I have finished with it, of course," as if on an afterthought Brock said. He looked over his shoulder curiously as he spoke.

But Barbara Nancy was watching what she took to be a glimmer of light weaving in and out of the trees on the far side of the bank. I never cared for it here, her thoughts went. "Let's go," she said.

They turned. As they did so the light reappeared between the trees, and Bridget herself, a small bull's-eye lantern in her hand, came down the steps towards them. Her white stockings showed in the dusk, the small light of the lantern cast large leaping shadows before her. Aged though she was she came on swiftly even yet and as though full of purpose still. But now her breath came audibly through her lips, and her hands and the slight movements of her head displayed an odd jerkiness. They waited. She came so close to them that a small stone brushed by her skirt rolled a little way and halted, as though obediently, between their feet.

Without looking at them or turning towards them, Bridget began speaking as though to herself. "A woman that is always alone makes her own company. What's far-off comes near, what's hidden can sometimes be seen. I'm alone, body and mind. Since Anna died there's an eternity of aloneness in me. Sometimes the grass waves like banners; there are bugles in the wind. Sometimes it is with me as it was with Anna that year before she died. I can feel things that are too dark to be seen. A generation marching backwards into the pit of war, I say, and they've no faces, no names; only courage, only hope and despair, only mottoes of courage, banners of hope and despair. I should like to go away," Bridget said, "from the sound of their feet. But Robert Tufton and Anna forbid me. Stay here, think, feel, they say."

She took a step forward blunderingly, then once more stood still. They could see her feet in the black-buttoned boots very large in the lantern beam and could sense the vague toss of her hands. "A few people grieve for ever," they heard. "And no one cares. When the grass is withered up and burned does the other grass care?"

Her head bent, her hands not moving now, Bridget went on further into the house, and once more the light of the lantern could be seen weaving uncertainly from burned-out room to room.

Barbara Nancy and Brock Doddington made their way in silence once more out of the timber yard. They halted by the gate.

"There it is, I told you," Brock said bitterly. He gesticulated. "No sooner do I feel myself free than once more I am pulled down. Crazier and crazier," he said. Again he moved his hands. "That house. My family." His voice broke for a moment, then trailed off. "Though I believe she is miserable. I hope she is miserable," he said, a peculiar satisfaction now in his voice.

Barbara Nancy had been startled. For months now

Bridget had been increasingly strange. Perhaps for that reason she had not been alarmed. What is there to be alarmed about? she asked again now. She remembered Bridget's words: "The grass waves like banners. There are bugles in the wind." I have felt like that, too, sometimes. But—"they've no faces, no names"—the words echoed once more in her mind. She shivered then. Why should Bridget speak and talk in this way? Unless she were indeed half-crazed. Unless the old hardness and unawareness of everything outside herself had finally broken down, unless the old Bridget were indeed transformed and changed.

"Couldn't one, oughtn't one, to be sorry for her?" she asked.

"Why be sorry? Why?" Brock spoke violently. "It's sentimental to be so relentlessly kind. One should be honest, I feel."

Barbara Nancy made herself small and passive and remote. It was her main defence against reproaches or scenes. At the same time she spoke plainly. "It is more comfortable to be kind. If that is being sentimental."

"It is," Brock said. "Indeed it is. But leave it. Did I tell you," he said, moving on, "that I have been accepted for the army, that I shall be off to-morrow?" He halted. "Or did I leave out the one, from your point of view, important thing?"

"Is that what you came to tell me?" So remote had she made herself that Barbara Nancy was scarcely able at once to appear surprised.

"Not only that," Brock said.

They paused outside the Furnesses' house. He rested a hand stiffly on one of the wrought-iron railings that flanked the steps and spoke jerkily. "I meant to ask you—to ask you to-night—if one day you would ever consider marrying me. Before I could do so Bridget must make everything appear impossible again. As if she knew what was in my mind. No, don't answer me," he said as Barbara Nancy

would have spoken. "Don't say anything. It might be No anyway. It probably will be No. So don't answer. At the moment I couldn't bear it." He stood a little way off, miserably. "Do you know what I have been asking myself? I have been asking myself how I can ever feel like anyone else, how I can ever be like anyone else? I can't," he said. "I shall go to-night. I shan't wait until to-morrow. Oh, it's impossible, Barbara Nancy, impossible," he said. "No, I can't stay. Almost I couldn't bear that." He turned then. In the next moment with a lift of his hand for good-bye he was gone.

"Write to me," Barbara Nancy called after him. "You must write to me." Between regret and compassion and something like relief she watched him go.

CHAPTER FOUR

FLOODTIME

A GREY leaping wind silvered the emerald of the grass; the yellow double daffodils in Mrs. Tubbs's front garden ruffled and tossed, and over the swaying tops of the great trees the rooks drifted and twirled like leaves. Under the note of the wind you could hear the sound of the flood-water racing like a chariot team of horses in the full river-bed, boiling round the trunks of the willows, spreading wider and deeper over the water-meadows.

It was Easter, 1916, and some subtlety of change, like spring, was in the air. Mrs. Tubbs—Mrs. Dummett that was—Mrs. Daffin, and Mrs. Odell, those three friends, were aware of it grumblingly and without passion, as some change in the weather would have made them aware of the rheumatism in their bones.

"Nothing is like what it used to be," Mrs. Tubbs mourned.

"The bread's awful, I'm sure it makes my poor Tubbs that poorly, and there's no heat in the coal, and what the young people nowadays are a-coming to, all this going round with soldiers, married men, asking for trouble, I don't know."

"I'm not a-going to let anything that happens in this war make any difference to me, Ada," Mrs. Odell said. "When it broke out first I said to Odell, 'I'm a-going on, Sam, just as I allays have gone on, gov'ment or no gov'ment, and so are you. I'll do my duty,' I says, 'but I'll not change one of my opinions.' War's wrong and allays has been wrong, and not Mr. Lloyd George nor nobody else given to making very telling speeches'll ever persuade me any different. War's a very onsettling thing and it never was intended for people to move out of their proper stations in the loud common vulgar way they are a-moving. Pianners," said Mrs. Odell, compressing her chin, "there never was so many pianners in our part of Bernygham when I was a girl as there is now in Sigbarrow and Alne. Tinkle, tinkle, out of every door and winder till you can't hear the birds, leave alone your own ears. And fur coats! Common as cats. And what they are made of if you ask me is cats, and nothing but cats, or, what's worse, rabbits. And all these concerts! Oh, what a lot o' concerts there are! And what do you hear?" Mrs. Odell inquired. "The doctor's new wife singing 'Little Grey 'Ome in the West.' Every concert the same. What's she know about little grey 'omes? She've allays lived in a big red rectory with twelve bedrooms and not a bit of warmth or comfort in the place, until she took and married Doctor Buddicombe. Fair swept him off his legs she did, if you ask me. No I don't hold with any of this war business," Mrs. Odell said.

"I'm sure I wish it was all over," Mrs. Tubbs said. "It gets on your nerves, it does, a-going on and a-going on. But there, what's the good of wishing?" Mrs. Tubbs sighed.

"You can see as much from this winder as ever you could, that's one comfort," Mrs. Daffin said, tapping one

foot in an absent manner on the flowered linoleum and looking out along the road and across the fields between Mrs. Tubbs's pots of geraniums. "How's Pleasaunce getting on, Clarice?" she inquired of Mrs. Odell without turning her head.

"She's getting on," Mrs. Odell replied, rather firm.

"I never see a woman plump out so," Mrs. Daffin said. "Thin you begin, thin you end. As a rule, that is. And fat the same. But not Pleasaunce. It's not as if she was allays expectin'. Though she is that pretty often, I will say."

"She is," said Mrs. Odell, tight-lipped once more.

"That boiled-sweet man she married—now he's quietened down and Pleasaunce livened up, you might say," Mrs. Daffin remarked again.

She leaned forward and spoke in a more animated fashion herself in the next breath. "Ain't this Miss Barnacle's nephew, or great-nephew, coming along now?"

All three women peered forward expectantly.

A strapping young man in a kilt passed at that moment just the other side of the cactus plants and the geraniums.

"Nothing much wrong with him," Mrs. Daffin remarked in admiring tones. "Even if his young lady did go down in the Loositania. A'n't she got a lot of nephews? Miss Barnacle, I mean, of course," she said.

"How's that then?" Mrs. Odell inquired.

"Well, there was eight of 'em, four boys and four girls, yes, that's right," Mrs. Daffin answered. "They was the talk of the neighbourhood while they lasted, like Tuftons are now. My father used to tell me about them. I don't know how it was, but the boys was all lazy and lively and the girls was all virtuous and industrious. There was only one of the girls that married, Miss Corny that was. Cornelia, of course. She went off to New Zealand. I fancy that's where that young man comes from."

"Will we be seeing you at church to-morrow, Grace?" Mrs. Tubbs all but interrupted her friend.

"I don't know, Ada, I don't," Mrs. Daffin said. "It's like this with me. I can't abear the sight and sound of flood-water. It's got a real angry sound this time o' year and a drowning look under the moon. And I can't say as I care for Mr. Charles's sermons. Real curate's sermons, I call 'em, like poor beer, they're so mild. I like a bit of brim-stone in my sermons and allays did. If you want to be happy in this world it's no good feeling too comfortable about the next."

"It's the old Rector a-preaching this Easter Sunday, they tell me," Mrs. Odell said. "Whatever for I don't know. Getting up out of his sick bed he is to do it, they say. But he allays did get some funny ideas into his head."

"Let's see, how old might he be?" Mrs. Tubbs appeared to be thinking aloud.

"Must be eighty-six if he's a day, same age as Miss Barnacle," Mrs. Daffin said.

"Bridget Tufton, where's she off to?" Mrs. Odell inquired suddenly.

"You don't often see her out, I must say. Only off to that old house of hers in the timber yard and back again," Mrs. Daffin said. And they all watched Bridget's tall figure beating before the wind across the field.

"Don't she look like one of them old black crows with that cloak of hers flying open?" Mrs. Tubbs whispered.

"You can speak up. She can't hear you, Ada," Mrs. Daffin said.

Presently Bridget, a basket over her arm, a bundle, or what looked like a bundle, under her cloak, passed the window and went on up the road leading to the Doddingtons' house.

"That's a cat under her arm and another in the basket," Mrs. Daffin, peering closer, said.

"Is it that awful tom she's got with her? I'll be bound it is," Mrs. Odell declared.

But Mrs. Daffin had opened Mrs. Tubbs's window and was leaning out in order to get a better view.

"Well, I don't know, Bridget Tufton, I don't," she said, withdrawing, and shutting the window again.

"Oh, Grace, what is it? I've gone all over queer." Mrs. Tubbs fanned herself, then held her head in one hand.

"You'll be all right, Ada," Mrs. Daffin said, still looking after Bridget. "It's my belief she's up to something. Something tells me. She's got more and more touched lately, as anybody can see." Mrs. Daffin sat down once more.

"That looks like our Pleasaunce coming along," Mrs. Odell said.

"So it is. Well, this is a day," Mrs. Daffin exclaimed.

"Tea and supper it'll be for six and they won't go until the half-past seven 'bus to Bernygham. Sure not to," Mrs. Odell said.

"She can have tea with me if you like, Clarice." Mrs. Tubbs moved to open the door. "We were all just speaking about you, Pleasaunce," she said.

"And I've seen Mrs. Tufton. And did she look peculiar?" Pleasaunce kissed everyone all round, tried one chair, rejected it as too small, chose another, and sitting down in it took two large pearl hatpins from her hat. "I left the children with their Gran, thank goodness," she said.

"If you don't choose chairs to fit you like somebody else trying on a pair o' stays, Pleasaunce," Mrs. Daffin remarked.

"Talking about Bridget Tufton," Pleasaunce said loudly, "I read a book once about witches."

"That old tale!" Mrs. Daffin was understood to say.

Mrs. Dummett admonished her friend. "Grace!"

"It's Jane Fairey coming now, that's all," Mrs. Daffin said in a smooth voice.

"Jane'll be going off after that woman too." Mrs. Tubbs looked vexed.

Presently Mrs. Fairey did indeed come into the shop. She looked, everyone agreed afterwards, like someone beside

herself. She had no bonnet on, and no coat, only a shawl about her head.

"Now tell us what's happened, Jane, do," Mrs. Tubbs coaxed, and she took away Jane Fairey's shawl and placed Jane herself in a chair.

"Nothing that I know of yet awhile. Not for certain awevver," Mrs. Fairey replied. She warmed her hands and looked into Mrs. Tubbs's fire. "I wouldn't worry so much," she said, "if Bridget hadn't gone and taken my tabby with her that's due to have kittens any minute now. Ellen says it's all talk and threats with her. But I know better. 'She wouldn't have taken my tabby with her,' I said, 'if she intended to come back.' "

"So she's left. Bridget Tufton, I mean. If I didn't suspect as much, if you couldn't see something o' that sort about her," Mrs. Tubbs said.

"She won't get far with them cats, I know," Mrs. Daffin remarked, "one of 'em going to have kittens and the other for ever a-going rabbiting."

"What is she about, do you think, Jane?" Mrs. Tubbs asked.

"I don't know," Mrs. Fairey said. "Ada, I don't know. But folks that are lost in their minds do go wandering." Her face brightened after a moment. "My George is up by the side of the wood, seeing his horses. Happen he'll catch sight of her and have sense enough to bring her back."

"I don't know why George should," Mrs. Tubbs said. "Jane, I don't know why anybody should." She accompanied Mrs. Fairey to the door.

"Maybe she'll come back of herself then," Mrs. Fairey said. She gathered her shawl about her head. "And now I'll go and set the tea ready for my George. He only come late last night. 'I'll take a good look at you, mother,' he says, 'and then I'll be off and talk to my horses.' Well, goodbye all." Slipping into the small space between the incoming wind and the opening door, Mrs. Fairey hurried away.

Beside the wood the wind uncovered the primroses, made a thin dry sound in the dead grasses. Bridget, the expectant tabby still in her basket, her tom-cat treading majestically beside her, crossed from the wood to the other side of the field. George Fairey hung his peaked cap on the gate-post, felt for the cubes of sugar in his pocket, leaned his arms on the gate, and whistled his horses. At the first whistle, a whistle no louder than that a bird might make, the three of them wheeled suddenly, then halted, and, their heads up, stood still. At the second they came galloping at full stretch towards him. Their manes tossed in the wind, clods of earth scattered under their hooves, and the rooks flew up, cawing into the air above the tops of the trees. More loving and more forgetful than any woman, George fondled his horses while Bridget slipped from shadow to shadow beside the far hedge out of sight.

It was April, and Easter Sunday, but March weather. The light in the church was cold and clear like the light that shines between the bare tree trunks in a wood in March. But like a wood in April the church was set with primroses and violets in yellow-green moss.

The voice of the soloist ceased, but the promise of the words of the anthem hung for a moment on the air. Margaret stood in her place in full view of the singer, her mind hard and slow with disbelief. Wait patiently? But patience is killed by waiting. And when the heart is stricken there is no longer any heart's desire. I was so fortunate I scarcely knew what happiness was. Only now and then I knew that happiness was to be discontented sometimes, but to love and be loved in return always. Now the charmed circle I made for myself is broken. Beside what I feel the words I am hearing now are meaningless. For happiness is only the peace of love, and grief the pain of remembering. A man, it is always said, belongs not to himself but to his country.

Fiction, all fiction, she thought. Like someone who does not wish to hear, she turned her head.

The shafts of light trembled across the aisle, and a flight of birds, light, soundless, small, swept behind the delicate tracery of trees, swept and passed. Gradually into the tired emptiness of her mind different thoughts came. Robert belonged to the world. The world took him. He was no age; he had no life. Her mind stayed empty for a moment. She thought again: he lived in liberty; he owed liberty a life, he would have said. But I know nothing; I shall never be certain of anything again, only that he was mine, that he is beyond me now.

Those people who observed her covertly over their prayer-books marvelled that she should show so few outward signs of grief. She was always one that was full of pride, they told themselves disapprovingly; and again, not so disapprovingly, she was never one to wear her heart on her sleeve.

Barbara Nancy was remembering that she had heard at last from Tamlin, a service postcard only from the western front. She had been glad at first. Afterwards she had told herself that it meant nothing, it was only a careless sudden kind of remembering.

She looked at her mother and was troubled. This control was too much; in the end, surely, it must break. Her mother had cut herself off from them all; she had retired, as if to fight better, within her own walls. Even Henry had retired into a fortress of his own making, which was battlemented, which was called glory. He had mourned alone for a day in the room the Philosopher and he had shared. "Let him fight it out for himself," his father had said. So, beyond going upstairs and looking at him now and then, no one had interfered. In the morning when Plompartay had left the house they had found, "Henry Furness, Royal Flying Corps," carved in the wooden ship's beam over his head. "So that's it," his father had said, "that's what he

intends." It was as if Henry felt himself challenged, as if this was the answer.

There could be no more waiting for the Philosopher. "I'll go find him," the Fisherman had said. He had found, not the Philosopher, but men who had been with him. "He fought white and he died game," they said. That was epitaph enough. Hero-worship stirred in Barbara Nancy once more; tears stung her eyes. She looked down at her hands. His hands were like my hands, she remembered, except that mine are small. The brass candelabra blurred, even the pink faces of the choirboys blurred. At a convenient moment she uncovered her face. Slowly the candelabra shone again, the lights on the altar burned steadily, the pink faces of the choirboys showed clear once more and the childish smear before her on the thin printed page.

The Reverend Beauchamp Walters mounted the steps of the pulpit with difficulty, and for the first time for years faced his congregation. He saw only a solid phalanx of bodies, a sea of faces, only the grey light in the church and the dark beams overhead, and the faded scarlet and gold of the banners that hung from the beams. And the roar of the flood-waters sounded to him for a moment like a rush of Pentecostal wings, so that he held his hands outstretched before him for a moment and did not speak.

The spring light was harsh and merciless upon him. He appeared dwindled and bent and small as he stood motionless there before them, his hands, that were so blue-white as almost to appear transparent, outstretched, his body a frail ghost of itself. He is old, so old, Margaret felt pityingly. It seemed to her, as she looked at him now, that nothing remained of the old fire, the old zest, only a fierce indomitable will. She remembered Frost Fair again and a hundred occasions since. I have travelled a long way with him, she thought.

He gave out his text in a voice that was quavering and

high, once more an old man's voice. "'I come to bring you not peace, but a sword,'" he said.

"'Not peace, but a sword,'" he said again, and paused. He leaned forward then. "Have you forgotten peace? War, constant, recurring always, is reality for us; peace no more than a dream that returns. Think for a moment. Man is older than the hills, and the hills themselves are sepulchres of war. Look there at the hill"—here he pointed down the chancel, out of the church door. "Within it the great chiefs sit, chin in hand, as though they dreamed in the windless dark. That is Sigbarrow Hill, the burial place, they tell us, of Sieg, and of men who were chieftains with him. And they, those hundreds of years ago, were men of war.

"Draw a map of time, time that has no beginning, that as yet has no end. All the zigzag tracks, marked by broken lines, all the high roads marked by solid lines, will be tracks of war. And over the blank spaces in the map you could trace if you would all the miseries and sorrows that follow war.

"Whence, you may ask, did this last war spring? I say out of the efforts and struggles of man mounting up from the beginning until this hour. Out of past time and forgotten victories and other wars. Out of Africa, out of the rich empty spaces of the earth. Out of things real and things imagined. Out of trade and commerce and empire. Out of the swift rush of the blood for battle, out of the sluggish rise of the blood for power. Out of man that is time's fool. Out of a constant blasphemy. The earth is mine and the fullness, says the Lord. No, mine, man has said, man made in God's image. Out of inventions and the mind of man and the enduring hardness of man, out of everything that is man's this war is born.

"There are none innocent, none guilty. Blood and the burden of tears lie on us all. For into the sweet sanity of man God has put a seed of madness, a germ of dominion,

of power. Before the eyes of man that see wonders, images of knowledge, of truth, of art, God has stretched a bright, a dazzling darkness, so that all things are confused and dark shows fair. From the seed of madness that leads to destruction come struggle and fear, come oppression, greed, envy, and battle. And courage. Always courage, and the love of brothers. Until in the end, out of the great and general blindness, there appears only the moment, the testing-time, only the struggle and the triumph, only defeat or victory."

The old man's voice, that had grown strong as he went on, faltered now, his mind seemed to wander, and the sermon, that was surely the strangest sermon ever heard in Alne, took on the character of a prayer. "O Maker of all things, have pity, forgive us, men that are slaves to men, and set us free. O suffering man, O Christ crucified, give us peace in our hearts."

The Reverend Beauchamp Walters ceased for a moment, and in that instant the minds of his congregation returned, startled, to themselves.

O suffering man, O child, O little child, Margaret's thoughts went, and for the first time since news of the Philosopher's death had reached them she wished to weep.

Almost whispering, the Reverend Beauchamp Walters spoke again. Held in the strangeness of the moment everyone listened and did not stir.

"Our birth is pain and sleep and a forgetting, our life no more than passion and a falling star. Between the two twilights, twilight of the world, twilight in the mind of man, grant, Lord, that a new world be born." He ceased, and, his hands held out, his lips murmuring still, he turned then.

He was old and ill; he was Irish; he had always been eccentric; it was possible that he might even now be a little queer. But he had been a good man to them always and a great preacher in his day, so that people came for miles to hear him and to gather as much of truth and fire

as they could from his lips. For over sixty years he had loved them and their children. So the old love his congregation had for him, and the old loyalty, held. They listened, some of them with awe but without understanding, while many were incredulous and amazed. Yet something of the truth of his message, disjointed and incomplete though it was, uncomforting though it appeared, reached them all.

They were moved, but they were not weakened. A mystery—they held themselves respectfully before it—was one thing; plain matter of fact another. There was freedom, for instance, which Mr. Walters, and this was very like a clergyman, had forgotten. There was the enemy again, not softening nor weakening either, and conquering still, and not far off. Deadlock in France, defeat in Russia, failure in Gallipoli, failure at Kut—the country had a long way to go yet, a great deal to do. It was of the country they thought, it was the country they remembered. There could be no peace, their minds told them, no peace without victory.

So Barbara Nancy interpreted, listening to the Reverend Beauchamp Walters and looking about her as well as she could. There was something unbending, it seemed to her, and pitying at the same time, in all the faces before her, in George Fairey's face, for instance, or Seth Doddington's, or Farmer Forester's, or Miller Chapman's, on Mrs. Daffin's face, and, not least of all, on the blunt and fiery face of Mr. Amos Tubbs. All of them, it seemed to her, listened and bent their heads and reserved judgment. It was as if, while echoing the Reverend Beauchamp Walters's "Give us peace in our hearts," they added, for themselves and for all Britain, "and victory, and victory." For they were not Irish, but plain English, and the germ of power was in them from their fathers, and the earth, from their fathers also, was firm under their feet.

Everyone was standing up. Like a man in too long a gown, the Reverend Beauchamp Walters made stumblingly for his chair. Before he was half-way he fell forward upon his

knees in the midst of the chancel. He stayed for a moment like that in full sight once more, and for the last time, of his congregation, a blind fixed look on his face, in his ears once more an oncoming rush of sound like wings. He spoke then, and almost everyone heard, words uttered on the scaffold by priests and plain men and condemned queens: "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit."

In pity and sorrow, and amazement also, they waited. In a silence broken only by the shuffling of feet, everyone still standing, they saw him carried away. Outside, more marked in the silence, the sound of the flood-water could be heard, lapping at the roots of the church, at the feet of the graves.

PART VII

BETWEEN THE TWO TWILIGHTS

CHAPTER ONE

BY TRAP TO A BLUEBELL WOOD

ANOTHER year had passed; the war dragged on, and even in Sigbarrow and Alne there were signs of struggle and portents of change. The war came nearer, laid a hand on everyone's shoulder; the world, like the sun in a November fog, seemed to look, immense and angry-red, into Sigbarrow and Alne over the hill. On moonlit nights now a throb of engines might be heard in the sky, and presently a zeppelin might be seen: a long, moulded silver shape, nosing and parting the light clouds like a fish weaving through weeds. But before any sound of engines could be heard, the pheasants, so the night watchmen in the woods said, like the geese in the Capitol, set up a shrilling and babel in the woods such as had never before been heard. From the hill-top the thin crossed swords of the searchlights would flash for an instant across the sky, and from somewhere not far off a gun would bark, staccato and dry, like an old fox barking. And the zeppelin, serene so far in its own space of sky, went on.

While so much happened that was far off and scarcely realized yet, together with so much that was familiar and close at hand, small things and great tended to become confused in people's minds. Between the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in March and the entry of the United States of America into the war in April Miss Kitty Barnacle died, and was carried splendidly to her grave by six of her nephews, all of them on compassionate leave for the occasion. A foreign professor and his wife—this also had never hap-

pened before in Alne, or even in Sigbarrow—lived in a house in the village and crept about as if they did not belong, as indeed they did not, to Sigbarrow and Alne. Already a large tomb of granite imprisoned the mortal remains of Miss Kitty upon the green earth. The inscription vied with the Russian Revolution and the probable fate of the Tsar and the Tsar's family as a subject of discussion. "In Paradise," very positively it said in large bold letters of black upon the speckled pink stone.

The satisfaction everyone felt at the entry of America into the war coincided in time with the reflected glory (in which at least half the neighbourhood shared) shed upon Sigbarrow and Alne by Farmer Forester's prize bull. The Sigbarrow Wonder, for so Farmer Forester had named his treasure, had been sold to the Argentine for the astonishing sum of a thousand guineas, had crossed the seas, and been shipwrecked, and rescued, and landed safely, and had since, so report said, done well.

But if Sigbarrow and Alne provided a good deal of private laughter for the detached onlooker, there were burdens people carried, sorrows they did not speak of, anxieties which, since they were the anxieties of millions, paradoxically enough, they could not share. The casualty lists lengthened inexorably, as though a hand struck off the names. George Fairey would call his horses no more: he was killed at Vimy Ridge. And Jimmy Gorrall, after seeing the world in the Royal Navy, died at Jutland beside his gun, and the seas covered him.

And the Fisherman was wounded, though perhaps not so seriously as they had feared, since he could write to them, since he wrote so cheerfully—not for the first time Barbara Nancy hugged this thought to herself as she waited. Her father was talking at greater length than was usual for him, and old Beeston, who had come with some papers for her father to sign from the Saddle and Harness Makers Company, was listening impatiently, as he always listened.

"If we lose Russia as an ally, and it looks as if we should," her father was saying, "we have gained the United States of America. It is something tremendous for them, you know, Beeston, so many of them, or their fathers before them, having shaken the dust of Europe off their feet, to come back over here again."

Barbara Nancy half-listened, then ceased to listen, sitting far back in the deep chair. The lime tree was almost in full leaf once more; the hedges were white like snow across the distant hills, and the meadow in which the lime tree stood was once more like an army with banners from all the red swaying tassels of the green sorrel and the waving plumes of the grasses. Though the morning was early yet, a child carrying a sheaf of bluebells passed. Barbara Nancy stirred uneasily with a sudden longing to be gone, then fell back and listened once more.

"Through taking so much punishment and giving it back again these three years we're a bit tired in this country," her father said. "But they are not tired. They are like a new tide of the sea coming in."

Barbara Nancy took up her hat and swung it by the long blue ribbon.

Her father turned his head. "Well, be off then. Tell Seth not to tip you out of the trap."

Henry came in from the next room. "Wait, I'm coming.'

"Why?" his sister asked. She waited.

"As far as the top of the hill. That's why." Henry smoothed his hair with both hands.

"I'm meeting the Doddingtons at the crossroads," Barbara Nancy said.

"The crossroads then."

Brother and sister came on together, Henry of course exchanging greetings with everyone whom they met. "Hello, Ted," "What ho! Jim," "Nice day, Mrs. Blunt."

"How do you know everyone?" Barbara Nancy inquired,

amazed. For not one of the people whom they met was known to her by name.

"I don't know them. They know me," Henry said modestly.

A green woodpecker ran round the bole of a tree and stayed silhouetted there for a moment when Henry spoke again. "Old Bathurst is hoeing up spuds just the other side of the hill."

"And you are going hoeing too, of course," his sister said.

"I shan't do more than lean against the stile. I don't care about hoeing spuds," Henry said.

Miss Bathurst—she could not be more than twenty—was famous in the neighbourhood as the first land girl so far to come to Alne. She wore baggy green cotton bloomers that everyone at first came out to see, and a long brown frock tunic with a green belt. She had a broad, charmingly flat nose and a quite unbelievably soft slurring voice, and from the first day of her arrival, which was still rather recent, Henry had discovered a great fascination for her.

"Old B. is quite different from anything you can see in these parts," Henry observed now.

It was on the tip of Barbara Nancy's tongue to say that it was only her green baggy bloomers that made Miss Bathurst appear different. But remarks of this kind left a tart taste in the mouth afterwards, as she knew. "I think she's conceited," she was about to say instead when Mr. Fustin, Farmer Forester's new cowman, came out of the field gate.

He greeted Henry at once. "How do."

Henry responded in the same fashion. "How do."

Mr. Fustin was in several ways a remarkable figure. A brilliant blue felt hat crowned a round red head, a short black pipe stuck out aggressively from between his lips. He had fierce blue eyes under bushy brows, shining copper bristles upon cheeks and chin. Over one shoulder he carried a spade, over the other a black bottle ducking about in a

shipwrecked way in a green shiny bag. He looked like an ancient mariner, Barbara Nancy thought. Like the Ancient Mariner, he began straightway to unfold a tale.

"I been here six weeks, Henry," he said.

"Ah," said Plompartay in an interested, gentle fashion.

"Doing for meself," Mr. Fustin said. He took his pipe from his mouth and spoke in a louder voice. "I wants no woman looking after my place, Henry. I'll have no more women making a fool o' me. Three years this Whit Monday it is since my wife left me. I'm not a drinkin' man, nor a greedy man, nor a quarrelsome man. She'd no cause to complain. But I didn't suit. It was this war. She wanted more life, she said. So she went to her ma's. And from her ma's she left me for a carpenter feller, one o' them, Henry, that works in a factory and puts the worm in the wood."

"Well, now," Henry said, marvelling and kind.

Mr. Fustin waved his pipe. "I could see how it was between 'em from the first go-off, the two of 'em looking at each other over the top of me. After six months she writes to me and says, Can she come back? Don't put no stamp on the letter either. He 'lowed her no money, I suppose. 'No,' I says, 'no. You've gone. Don't come back.' And I puts no stamp on my letter either. So in the end she goes to law against me, Henry. To law." Mr. Fustin paused impressively.

"What did you do then, Mr. Fustin?" Henry asked.

"This is what I did, Henry." Mr. Fustin cleared his throat and spoke with renewed energy, while Barbara Nancy shot a glance at Plompartay and Plompartay shot a sideways deprecating glance at her. Mr. Fustin continued. "This is what I do, Henry. I gets a book and reads it all up about the law. Then I goes to a lawyer and he explains it all to me over afresh. 'Take the case yourself, Mr. Fustin,' he says. 'And if you get into trouble I'll be there.' So I goes to court. There she sits, all drawed off in her best clothes and lookin' at me every now and then under her hat, and

the Judge gazin' mighty serious over his spectacles at us both as if we was the King and Queen of the Belgiums, and a lot of folk I know and she knows, busybodies, sitting and gaping at us from some benches with their mouths open like toads in dry weather. 'You can't make me have her back, sir,' I says. 'She left me for another man of her own accord without just cause and I'll not have her back, no more than I'd have back a pair o' boots from a bootmaker's that somebody else had worn. And I'll pay nothing for her keep, neither. Not unless I'm obliged to. Nobody can make me have her back,' I says. 'That's the law.' And the judge and me looks at each other, fair and square. 'Yes,' the judge says. 'That is the law.' 'Thank 'ee,' I says. 'I got fifty cows to milk that won't wait. And you'll excuse me, I hope.' And I comes away. She's dead now, Henry. Died a week since, so they sent me word. 'She's nothing to me, dead or alive,' I says. And I sent them word."

"You didn't go to see her?" Henry sounded curiously abashed.

"She knowed me. When she went off with that carpenter feller she knowed what I'd do." Mr. Fustin paused. "But I got a girl, Henry."

"Eh!" Henry showed surprise for the first time.

"A daughter, he means," Barbara Nancy, upon whom Mr. Fustin had not as yet cast one look, said hastily.

"That's right, ma'am," Mr. Fustin said, as though seeing her for the first time. "A girl six years old. I been paying for her care and keep with a couple I know. And every so often when they're not expecting me I goes and looks at the girl to make sure she's happy and clean and fed. The best folks in the world gets careless, Henry, so that's what I do. If she was a boy I'd have her with me and do for her myself. But you can't, Henry," Mr. Fustin said—"with a young female o' that age you can't."

"She'd be happy enough," speaking like a father himself, Henry said.

"Not a girl." Mr. Fustin spoke uneasily. Once more he waved his pipe. "I could have managed a boy," he said.

"How d'you like Forester's?" Henry asked.

"Me and the old man gets on valiant. Valiant we do. But not him they call the young master. He haven't the guts of a mouse," Mr. Fustin said.

"Well," Henry said, "well," apologetically, for the hill was before them, and the crossroads lay at the top of the hill, and on the skyline a small figure bent to what might be a field of potatoes and bent again.

"I'm off." Mr. Fustin waved vaguely. "To my allotment, Henry. Good day to you both." In the next moment he had turned off down a path on their left.

"He called you Henry." Barbara Nancy sounded surprised.

"That's what everyone else calls me," Plom said.

They reached the top of the hill. At once Plom became more alert. Barbara Nancy shaded her eyes. Miss Bathurst, a red handkerchief over her head, was moving down the field towards them.

"Here comes old Hoppety-skip," Plom said, inclining an ear. For Hoppety-skip was the name the neighbourhood had given to Croft's old mare. And Plom drew off towards the potato field.

Croft's trap, Seth holding the reins, Ellen sitting jauntily beside him, drew up. Ellen leaned down pityingly and said, just as Barbara Nancy had expected her to do: "How red and hot you look, you poor thing."

Barbara Nancy climbed into the back of the trap; Seth flicked his whip, Hoppety-skip snorted, stretched her legs, and, very comparatively speaking, flew along the high level stretch of road. Already Miss Bathurst in the potato field and Plompartay leaning against the stile were almost out of sight. The wind blew from the south, shining brown husks lined with rose fell in showers from the sycamore trees and drifted and lay like a thousand empty chrysalids of

butterflies upon the grass. On either side below them the long valley stretched: the sloping fields, the tiny farmhouses, the dark stripes of hedgerows, and against the shining round of sky and cloud, the rooks, as if in some sort of aerial circus, hung and wheeled.

Seth pointed out landmarks as they drove along. That square white house was where Bush, the brain specialist, used to live. And that grey house, that looked like a gaol from its dozens of small windows, was where Colonel Mallaban lived. Mallaban's Horse in the Boer War. "No end of a fellow for the ladies the Colonel was. Must have been those long yellow moustaches of his."

"I can't bear yellow moustaches," Barbara Nancy said and held on to her hat.

But Ellen, from her seat beside Seth, spoke only of personal things, pausing now and then to shoot questions like peas into Barbara Nancy's ear. Was it true about the new cowman beating his wife and his wife having left him? Did Barbara Nancy know? "He did not beat her." Barbara Nancy was indignant. Then it must be another story put about by that Dummett woman, Ellen said in vexed tones. She sat back in her seat.

"Come now, come." Seth touched up the mare. He inquired of Barbara Nancy: had they any more news of the Fisherman? There was a real concern in his voice.

"No more," she answered. The War Office had reported him as seriously wounded. But he himself had sent a postcard a week ago to say he was fine and coming home.

Upon this Seth repeated all the old things vaguely but comfortingly: how it was a good thing the Fisherman was out of the line for a while, and how vastly improved methods of surgery were in these days, and again, what astonishing recoveries were in fact made.

"Yes," Barbara Nancy said, "yes," in a stoical voice. For the pure nastiness of being wounded survived, she felt, all the kind things people said.

This new battle round Arras, Seth continued—he expected John had been in that. "What beats me," he said, "is that we've got to fight big battles and lose thousands of good men in this war, thousands, for a few yards of trench."

Barbara Nancy agreed stoically again. Don't go on talking about the Fisherman, she prayed as loudly as she could.

"And have you heard," Ellen said, "that Rosa Fairey is coming home from Australia with her two children?" She lowered her voice, though not a soul was within hearing or indeed within sight. "Her husband isn't any good, they say."

"Any good for what?" Seth said. "Roving a bit, that's all he is, from what I've heard."

Ellen bridled. "A good-for-nothing sailor she met on the boat going out and married in port."

"I remember Rosa," Barbara Nancy said. "Mrs. Fairey told us that Rosa walked twenty miles through the bush alone with her small Johnny in order to get him to a doctor in time."

"Ah, that was like Rosa," Seth said. He laughed reminiscently. "What's her husband's name? Fairclough, is it?"

"There are the woods." Ellen pointed suddenly to a hillside some little distance away on their left still. The slope was barred with prostrate trunks of trees; dark heaps of brushwood were piled in the cleared spaces, and between the close ranks of unfelled trees was a mist of blue. Already the bluebell scent was sudden, then vanishing on the warm air. Beside them a beanfield ruffled and tossed, and from the forest of beanstalks a grounded lark sang unseen.

At the top of the hill a number of things began to happen at once. Seth turned sharply left down a drive. Ellen straightened her hat, forgot her neighbours and began to think of young Mr. Charlie Blades whom she would shortly meet for the second time at the farm. The mare, after dawdling sadly, picked up her legs to some purpose again.

And Barbara Nancy came out finally from the half-dreaming state she was in, in which anything might happen, in which Prince Florizel might meet Perdita again, and the grounded lark go on singing for ever, and looked about her hopefully and fanned her face.

It was not more than half an hour later. Barbara Nancy came on deeper into the wood. The needle shafts of sun shone brokenly through the bright shadow patterns of the boughs; the bluebell scent seemed to lie in pools. When her arms were so filled with bluebells they could hold no more she sat down. It was quiet in the wood, only the leaves stirred. It was sleepy too. She produced a book from her pocket—Seth and Ellen were at the farm; they would meet her at the other side of the wood, they had said. They might be some little time away, Seth had added, for old Blades drove a hard bargain and liked to take a deuce of a time over it as well. Barbara Nancy laid her book on one side. She did not wish to read, she did not wish to do anything. Her sensations—in so much air and scent and sun she had scarcely any thoughts—grew pleasantly blurred. Without intending it in the least, quite soon she was asleep.

The sun, rising higher, its rays slanting now between the leaves, was like a burning-glass upon her closed eyes. She woke with a start.

"I was wondering when you would do exactly that," Tamlin said.

He was leaning against a tree, a few yards away from her, looking lazy and amused, and—here Barbara Nancy sat up quickly—even a shade tender as well, but in such a general fashion, she assured herself at once, as to mean nothing.

"I was thinking of something quite different," she said. She felt astonished and indignant also. For no one, she reflected, likes to be discovered asleep.

"Pity. You had your mouth open," Tamlin said.

Barbara Nancy got to her feet in alarm.

He laughed at her. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

It was like Tamlin, Barbara Nancy thought, to get his question in first. She answered with dignity.

"And you?" she said then.

"Did you get my postcard? I sent it, let me see"—he thought for a moment—"in March of last year, in March nineteen-sixteen."

"You remember the date?" Barbara Nancy was surprised.

"Don't you?"

"Yes," she said.

"Well then." He came on with her, walking just a pace ahead down the narrow path. "What am I doing here? you asked. I was hit in the head. About six months ago. I had the most confounded headaches and insomnia and nightmares afterwards. So they sent me down here to do forestry to finish my cure. Something quiet, and in the open, and absorbing, was prescribed." Tamlin grimaced. He scoffed a little then. "Oh yes, I am quite half-way to recovery. I sleep more often than not, that is. It's so peaceful I dream, of course, of the birds building their nests, and the primroses opening, and the grass pushing up."

How long had he been here? Barbara Nancy wished to ask. But instinct told her that Tamlin had been in the neighbourhood some little time. And she had difficulty in collecting her thoughts.

"Queer I should be sent just to this place, don't you think?" he said. He stopped short and turned and looked at her.

She spoke quickly then. "You like it?"

He nodded. "It's dead quiet. That's the main thing. "Though dead quiet can keep you awake, to say the least of it," under his breath he said.

He was thinner. He appeared harder. There was a haggardness about his face, lines Barbara Nancy did not

remember on either side of his mouth and beneath his eyes, lines that seemed to imply more than tiredness or strain.

"Well!" As if he felt her eyes upon him he turned once more and smiled suddenly. His whole face softened then, his eyes showed a clear light-grey in his sunburned face. "I only know one thing," he said. "I've become darned unsociable. But perhaps you have noticed that?"

"Yes." She spoke composedly. "Where are you taking me?" she asked then. For all at once it appeared to her that she was being conducted steadily out of the wood.

"To the other side." Tamlin spoke half over his shoulder.

"And if I don't wish to go?"

"Wait." As if there were something in store for her, "Wait and see," Tamlin said.

The wood grew darker as they moved further in. They stepped over felled saplings, over stripped tree trunks. On the other side of a thick belt of trees a clearing opened out unexpectedly before them. In the centre a vast bonfire of twigs and boughs burned from a red heart of flame. Beside the fire, heaping fresh fuel upon it, stood two side-whiskered old men in cabbage-hats, in stout corduroys tied at the ankle and looped at the knee. The two old men paused as the two young people came up. Leaning on their pitchforks, they looked towards Tamlin, and the scorched green leaves fell around them in a fresh burst of flame like the torn wings of butterflies.

"Mr. Argify Anderson. Mr. Moggy Griffith." Tamlin introduced them solemnly.

At this the smaller of the two old men addressed Tamlin in a quick, inaudible aside, and Tamlin answered him with a cavalier gesture of one hand.

They moved away once more. As they did so Barbara Nancy turned to look back at the thin transparent curtain of smoke and the two old men, so bent and gnarled, just on the other side, and the rainbow-coloured waves of heat flowing from the heart of the fire.

"What was it one of them said?" she inquired.

"That was Moggy," Tamlin said. "Moggy is untranslatable. Now Argify, by comparison, is quite pure. Argify, because Anderson is a great man at an argument. He is something of a flat-earther as well. The earth can't be round, he says. And for why? Because if it were round we should all fall over the other side into China. Argify has thought the matter out, he is a great geographer, you see."

It was all very unreal, Barbara Nancy thought as she listened. This politeness was unreal. Tamlin was talking like someone trying to fill in a conversational gap. As if we were strangers, she thought, as if we were at a tea-party and newly met. She stayed silent therefore. And the young man, quite suddenly, was silent too.

Tamlin has asked nothing of me, she thought again, nothing, no news of any one of us, no news even of the Fisherman; clearly I can ask nothing of him.

Near the gate leading to the farm once more she paused. "Now that you have escorted me out of the wood as if I were a trespasser, goodbye," she said.

Tamlin's eyebrows shot up in delight and surprise. "I wouldn't have expected that kind of thing from you," he said.

"I enjoyed your wood. I shall remember the old men. Thank you," she said.

"Don't be cross. I'll tell you something." Tamlin leaned against the gate.

"I don't wish to hear," she said.

"I did not want to see anyone," Tamlin said. "I am not, if you like, in the mood for company."

"So I am company." She looked away.

"Well, come again," Tamlin, watching her, said.

"When you have gone I will come again."

"Not before? Are you sure?" He came after her a little way through the field on the other side of the gate.

He paused then. "Better give them some sort of message from me."

Barbara Nancy stood still. "What message?"

"Tell them—oh, tell them what you like. I've no special message." His mood changed abruptly once more. He began to walk away.

She went on. Childishly, for she was bewildered and hurt as well as disappointed, she rubbed a hand across her eyes. She stumbled then.

Tamlin noticed both stumble and gesture. He caught up with her once more. "Don't mind. Try to understand. You could if you wished." As quickly as he had come he went away.

Seth and Ellen kept for the most part a contented silence on the way back. The trap tilted and swayed on the uneven road, a hawk balanced high over a cornfield, the wind blew a shade cooler; the sun was only a silver lining now to a dark cloud. Barbara Nancy sought for excuses for Tamlin and for herself. We were not prepared for each other. We have both changed. And three wartime years was a long time. Honesty, for she could not easily deceive herself, crept in. Tamlin was not even interested; except for the first few moments he was scarcely friendly. All her thoughts led to the same question. Was this show of indifference on Tamlin's part new? Or did it spring, as she was inclined to believe, from causes about which as yet she knew nothing? He had never been conventionally polite. If conventional good manners consisted in a large part of pretence, he was rude. For Tamlin made it a matter of pride never to pretend; he seldom cared to conceal either boredom or distaste. As steadily as she could she went over the encounter once more in her mind: the omissions, the momentary revelation of himself, the sudden gentler fit at the end. Nothing, except an added painful confusion, came from it all. It was likely, she felt, that he would make no attempt to see them. And yet she could scarcely believe this possible. Surely it

was not possible, she thought, for Tamlin to put them all out of his mind. Try to understand, he had said. Understanding made very little difference, she protested.

It was at this point that Ellen turned and tapped her shoulder. "Naughty girl. Seth and I saw you."

Barbara Nancy roused herself. She tried not to speak coldly. "We met by accident," she explained. And, in answer to Ellen: "No. Captain Speight is no blood relation," she said.

"Is he the one with the yellow eyes?" Ellen asked eagerly.

Tamlin's eyes were grey, Barbara Nancy said.

"You will be seeing plenty of Brock when he comes on leave," Ellen said.

"I expect so." Barbara Nancy was careful to agree.

The fields circled past, were left behind. A sunset glow lay on haystack and barn and the distant grey and yellow lichened roofs of Alne. The telegraph wires shone copper-bright and the yellowhammers swung and sang upon them. It was always like this, Barbara Nancy thought. Gradually something definite and cool emerged from the confusion of her mind. Tamlin was always solitary. Tamlin always walked by himself. And the war and the experiences of the war had added, no doubt, to his mood. To have fought through Gallipoli and Ypres and the Somme, to have been badly wounded in the end—so much was perhaps explanation enough.

It was not until the trap turned the sharp corner into Alne that she found words to clothe her thought: "Soldiers can seldom be easy when they come home from the wars."

CHAPTER TWO

THE SPRING

THE field at the back of the Doddingtons' house was planted with young apple trees, each one in full blossom now. They held Barbara Nancy's eye. She wore a thin blue and white crocus-striped frock; she was bare-headed. Tamlin looked at her curiously.

"Oh, listen to this." Brock Doddington was leaning against a tree, a periodical from which he was reading in his hand.

Barbara Nancy caught Tamlin's look and laughed and came back to herself. "I'd gone off into nowhere," she explained.

"Listen to this, listen," Brock said, and he ran a hand through his hair.

"What?" Tamlin turned for a second only. To Barbara Nancy he said, abrupt as he always was: "I've a cottage at the edge of the wood. But you know that. Will you come some time?"

"You will change your mind, you will wish to be alone." She screwed up her mouth and her eyes and laughed at him.

"Not all the time." He spoke shortly. He looked across at Brock. "What is it?"

He crossed over. But Brock, it was clear, had gone off on a journey of his own. "'It is not the war that matters,'" he read silently again, "'it is the spring.'"

That anyone should be so precious, and so dense, he thought. He spoke his thought aloud. No one answered. No one even appeared to hear.

He waited. Slowly, delicately drifting as ever, the blossoms in all that blossoming country fell and drifted into the mists between the trees. From being remote, thought for Brock

became sharply personal. For a moment he was filled with pity for himself, for everyone remotely resembling himself. I am the spring, he thought. I and others like me, all young people everywhere—we are the world's spring.

Tamlin put a hand on his shoulder. "Let's have it."

Brock laid a finger on the printed page. He spoke once more. "That anyone in wartime should be so smug!"

"To hell with the poets," Tamlin declared after he had read the passage.

Barbara Nancy objected. "Tamlin, you might, you might indeed, write a poem yourself."

Tamlin looked at the passage a second time. "Honestly if there were a poet of that order in my family I'd wring his ghostly neck."

"How would it feel," Brock asked rather wanly, "to wring a ghostly neck?"

"A bit like wringing yours, I imagine," Tamlin answered good-humouredly.

"How unpleasant you are still," Barbara Nancy accused Tamlin.

"Doddington can look after himself, you know," he said.

"I did not object to that one bit," Brock put in.

"It is the unpleasantness I mind," Barbara Nancy said.

They are quarrelling about me. But I don't exist for them, Brock thought quietly but painfully. Not looking at them any longer he leaned against the tree. The branches lifted, the trunk quivered to the wind. "I can feel this tree holding against the tug of the wind," Brock said. He spoke aloud and chiefly to himself.

"I won't stay," Barbara Nancy said.

Whatever could be happening? Ellen shook her feather duster as far as she dared out of the top attic window of the house in the hope of hearing more.

Tamlin turned from Barbara Nancy and laid a hand on Brock's sleeve. "What was that about the tree?"

Brock took away his arm. "Am I in this? I thought it was private between you."

"More states of mind. Oh, Lord," Tamlin said.

Barbara Nancy walked quickly away. She refused to look back; equally, although Ellen was shaking all her dust and her feathers upon her, she refused to look up. It was impossible to go into the house yet since she did not wish to be questioned about Brock or about Tamlin. She made her way, therefore, towards Mrs. Fairey's cottage. For I might see Rosa, her thoughts went. Or Rosa's children. Rosa has been home a week now and I have not seen her. I remember Rosa, that yellow hair and the shake of her head when she ran—Rosa would always run if she could. If it were anyone but Tamlin who had annoyed me—here, in spite of herself, her mind turned back—I would stay in the Doddingtons' garden, I would be sensible. But there is a tension between Tamlin and me which makes me assert myself, which makes me behave childishly. Tamlin resents me; he likes me very well too; I think the tension between us springs from some sort of struggle in his mind rather than in mine. It follows from all this that I must behave foolishly to-day on Brock Doddington's embarkation leave, on the occasion of Tamlin's first visit to the Furnesses. Why must everything that a short time ago was so simple become all at once so complicated? Oh, feelings, feelings—here she shook herself in disgust—feelings and mind never match. Where Tamlin and I are concerned my mind, and only my mind, stays clear.

Conscious of her own unreason she walked by the stream that skirted the field. The river ran smoothly by the timber yard; it lapped at the red loam and clay of the crumbling banks and the twisted grey roots of the willows; it sang, or so it seemed to her as she listened, the same pleasant, bird-like song it had always sung.

Rosa Fairey that was, Rosa Fairclough as she had become, was standing just the other side of the gate, looking out

over the field and the near curve of the river to the village beyond. She waited smilingly, but without moving, for Barbara Nancy to come nearer.

"How are you?" she asked then. "How is everybody?" —but not as if she cared.

She wore a stiff white blouse with a dark skirt, there were dark shadows under her eyes; her hair showed ripe yellow under the arched green fan of the trees. "I knew you when you were far enough off by your walk," she said. "You never did touch your heels overmuch to the ground."

She remembered Brock and spoke about him in the same lazy off-hand fashion. "I bullied him into standing up for himself. But he never really enjoyed it. He always wanted to lie down. He never thought it worth the trouble, I expect, and perhaps it isn't. I don't know," Rosa said.

"Really he has changed," Barbara Nancy protested.

"Oh yes, we all change, good thing we do," Rosa said, rather dry.

In the small silence that followed she turned to Barbara Nancy and spoke again. "The old lady's back, did you know?"

"Mrs. Tufton?" It was Barbara Nancy's turn to be surprised.

"She came here first. She can't leave the place, I suppose," Rosa said. "It'll be a mixed blessing, I know, for everybody that she's come back."

"She was ill, wasn't she?" Barbara Nancy spoke hesitantly. She wished to deal kindly with Bridget, but she could find nothing to say that was both truthful and kind.

"A bit cracked, you mean," Rosa said. "Picked off the road like that and put in a home, wasn't she? They tame you, those homes. What a name for them! What, I think sometimes, if they put my Johnny in a home? My small Johnny, I mean. That's what would happen if I never went back to his father; you can't work and keep three children, at least I can't," Rosa said.

Three, Barbara Nancy thought. She listened sympathetically.

"Two now, and one in February," Rosa said. She paused. "I'm waiting for Master Johnny to find out that he misses me. I may wait a long time."

"Do men forget your kind? I shouldn't think so." Barbara Nancy spoke her thought aloud.

"Every kind, believe me," Rosa said.

A short squat figure pushed open the far gate of the field and came slowly towards them, wheeling a hand-barrow.

"That's our Arthur," said Rosa, smiling faintly now.

"The cowman!" Barbara Nancy looked surprised.

"Don't cowmen have names?" Rosa said.

"I didn't know Mr. Fustin's name. I didn't know he came to see your mother." Barbara Nancy spoke in dignified fashion.

"Oh, Arthur's always here," Rosa said. "So will old Bridget be now that she's back. One day we shall be fixed up for ever with one of them, I hope it's Arthur, I hope it is, though with any luck I shan't be here to see," Rosa said all in a breath.

"More wood wanted, Arthur?" she called out as Mr. Fustin and his wheelbarrow drew near.

"Ah." The barrow was rested on the grass and Mr. Fustin rubbed first one hand, then the other against the sides of his rough working coat. "Goes numb, my hands do. The rheumatism," he explained. He looked at Rosa. "Would your ma like a few radishes, did you say?"

"She might." Rosa flicked a look at Barbara Nancy, then flicked her gaze instantly away. "She'll be glad of anything, Arthur, anything. Like me."

"Not anything she won't. Not your ma, I know," Mr. Fustin said. After some fumbling he produced a bunch of radishes from his pocket and proffered them silently. "While I was about it I thought I'd come along and put your ma in a few for herself as well," he said.

"Cultivating our garden, aren't you, Arthur, very nice and kind of you." Rosa pulled a radish from out of the bunch and began nibbling it. "Tidy man, ah, tidy, like a sailor," she said. "You've cleaned them ready to eat, too, Arthur, that's what I like."

Mr. Fustin watched her, a certain hard pleasure on his face. "Clean-tasting things, radishes. Like when you're in love for the first time," he said.

"Only the first time?" Rosa asked, her head on one side. With a jerk of one hand she threw the radish away. "She's back, Arthur, don't tell me you've heard."

"Lady Tufton? I heard." Mr. Fustin grasped the handles of his barrow once more. "A nice rigmarole, every bit of it," he said, looking at Barbara Nancy now. Trundling the wheelbarrow, he went on through the gate into the timber yard.

Once more Rosa leaned her head on her arms and looked out over the field.

For a moment neither of the two women spoke.

"Well, it's peaceful." At last Rosa turned her head.

"It's different underneath," Barbara Nancy said. She spoke dreamily. Her mind turned in other and wider circles, in which thought was all but transformed into seeing. The field changed: it became scarred and torn; it became any one of a thousand battlefields.

"You always were a queer little thing," Rosa said, interrupting her. "What made you say that?"

"At the back of my mind I was thinking of my brother, of John." Barbara Nancy roused herself and flushed guiltily under Rosa's prolonged stare. "He is coming home in the *Olympic*—she's a hospital ship now. I was thinking of the war," she said hurriedly, "and, oh, half a dozen things. I wasn't quite listening to Mr. Fustin."

"My Johnny is in the Navy, an Australian ship." Rosa spoke more simply now, more like the Rosa that was,

Barbara Nancy thought. "I always said I would marry a sailor," Rosa said.

"You like Australia? Of course you do," Barbara Nancy corrected herself at once.

"God's own country," Rosa said.

"Not better than this?" Barbara Nancy moved a hand in astonishment towards the curve of the river and the crescent curve of the small houses. "Australia is vast like heaven, I know. And a bit empty too." She paused.

"A bit empty. You've hit it there." Rosa laughed.

She spoke again with a sideways glance at Barbara Nancy in the next moment. "They say England's a garden. It looks like a lawn and a few flower-beds to me. And all for gentlemen."

Barbara Nancy turned serious. "You are talking big, too big, Rosa. That is not true of this country any longer. I doubt if it was ever true."

"I like to hear anybody speak up," Rosa said lazily. She turned away from the gate. She faced Barbara Nancy. "I've come home when I didn't have to come. What more do you want?"

"I don't want anything." Barbara Nancy spoke seriously still. "I don't know what I want." Once more she appeared to think aloud.

"The second's more like it," Rosa said, and she reached up a long arm and pulled down a half-opened chestnut leaf and spread it between her fingers delicately. "When we were kids we made skeleton leaves of these, do you remember?" she asked.

Tamlin was amused to find himself walking very fast to a pace set by Brock Doddington along the road leading to Sigbarrow.

"Go on walking it off," he said very amiably at last.

Brock looked guilty and slackened pace.

"I don't suppose there is anything to be done about it," Tamlin declared in cheerful tones.

"Nothing." Head down, Brock plunged then. "To tell the truth, I was wondering what sort of showing I should make when I get out there. My fear is, you see, that realities may be too much for me, that the pretence, if it is a pretence, I have built up in the past two years will break down and I'll be back where I was. I'm afraid, if you like, that I shan't be Second Lieutenant John Brock Doddington any longer, I'll sink to being Johnny Brock. It's the continual going on that I dread—that and the boredom of going on. With the boredom," he said slowly, "you might lose sight of the thing itself. And there's the certainty that one day the unexpected will happen and then you may be taken off your guard, or driven beyond what you can stand." He paused. He looked at Tamlin.

Tamlin answered him seriously. "It is routine, most of it."

"I know I'm dramatizing the situation a bit," Brock said. "But d'you mind telling me, since you've listened so far, did you yourself ever feel like this?"

"I was conceited enough to think I'd probably be all right. Probably—I didn't go beyond that. Why can't you tell yourself the same thing?"

"I haven't enough conceit, I suppose. Or not enough conceit of the right kind." Brock stopped short, then plunged desperately again. "I'd like you to know that I've never spoken like this to anyone else. I didn't even intend to speak to you."

In the second's pause that followed Tamlin said: "You're all wrong, you know."

"I was hoping you would say something else," Brock said.

"There isn't much to say." Tamlin put both hands in his pockets. "But first, let's decide where we are going. If we don't, we shall end up heaven knows where. Do we go into the Fortunes of War?"

"No. I hate pubs," Brock said.

"Then we go on walking." Tamlin turned to the left down a path that led between houses to open fields and finally once more to Alne.

"It did strike me you were being a bit too wrought-up," he said. "It isn't just your problem. Everybody, more or less, is faced with it. You don't fight this war alone, you know."

"Fear," Brock said almost with excitement, "is the worst enemy. Fear is the only enemy."

Tamlin went on a little way and did not speak.

"If I fell down on this I should be done for. I should perish," Brock said.

Tamlin switched at some grasses with his stick. "A bit theatrical, isn't it, wanting to perish and all that?"

"I can believe it sounds theatrical," Brock said.

Tamlin spoke carefully. "Suppose you were asked to do something, whether in war or peace, which, doing your level best and more than that perhaps, you could not do, would you talk of perishing then? Superhuman demands don't make supermen." Once more he cut at the hedge as they passed. "Besides, you won't perish. Unless it is through being over-conscientious, like a woman." He was silent for a moment. "It would be no good, I suppose, telling you to step down a peg or two on the plane of existence?"

Brock did not speak.

"It's a matter of endurance, I suppose, first and last," Tamlin said. "In the end that means some form of strength or will. Though where will comes from, and where strength, don't ask me. The truth is, and I've found that out for myself, if a man goes on long enough in modern war both strength and will can wear a bit thin." He looked up. "I managed pretty well until this last do, until I was shot in the head. But not since."

Brock was listening to his own thoughts. It was only afterwards that he remembered what Tamlin had said.

"I ought not to be bothering you or anyone," he said unhappily. Overwhelmed for a moment, he looked away.

Half-satirical, Tamlin glanced at him.

I am Johnny Brock, Brock told himself, aware of the glance, I shall always be Johnny Brock. And this, obviously, is the same Tamlin.

Out of awkwardness he stumbled in the next moment.

"For the Lord's sake look where you're getting to, man," Tamlin said. "And get this hero preoccupation out of your mind. You don't consider yourself a hero, and as a consequence you feel you must try to become one. Oh, rubbish," Tamlin said. "Soldiering is a job. Good soldiers don't chase after medals, don't talk big before an event or small after. But I need not tell you that. After all, if by one process or another you do get to be a fighting man you have a feeling nothing else gives you. You're on top of yourself, on top of the earth. It feels like that—while it lasts. It's true there is always this business of fear. But I say again it's not your fear only. In time, though you probably don't ever cease to be afraid, you learn to take charge of your own fear. You don't let yourself get mixed up in it too far. You find that even fear doesn't last." He looked at Brock. "That's talk, of course. And whatever one says, even of oneself, may only be half-true. But you asked me how I felt. And that, as far as I can get at it, is how I feel. I admit I never thought very much about this sort of thing before I went out. My way is not to think. Your way is to think yourself into a state of mind. A man goes a bit numb from not thinking—at least I do. But he doesn't get into a whirl. And that seems to me to be a pretty important thing, for one's own sake and everybody else's sake. This heroic business simply won't do. It's useless and worse than useless. The extra strain involved in keeping it up can come very near breaking a man."

"I have to screw myself up a bit. I have to hold inquests. Or I'd get nowhere, I'd do nothing," Brock said.

"Don't make such a darned mental fuss about everything," Tamlin said.

"I don't wish to fuss either." Brock sounded obstinate and a shade sultry as well. "I must react to things in my own way," he said.

"Well, well," Tamlin declared tolerantly, but no more than tolerantly.

Once more they came out into the road. "We're back again. This is where all discussions end, at the starting-point," Tamlin said.

"Thank you anyhow," Brock said.

Tamlin opened his mouth, looked surprised, closed it again.

A few yards from the Doddingtons' house they parted. Tamlin put out a hand. "Well, good luck."

"Goodbye." Brock turned at once, all the special torments reserved for those who make confidences and then regret having made them upon him, and went on into the house.

Tamlin went into the wood. "Why bother me?" he asked. "I'm no captain of my soul." He picked up a stone and threw it as hard and as far as he could.

The stone hit on the trunk of a tree and came bouncing off. "Not so good," Tamlin said. "Oh, not so good." Once more he spoke aloud.

Mrs. Daffin advanced—to Tamlin she appeared suddenly to emerge—from just the other side of the hazel thicket beyond the tree.

"Did you throw that stone? Did you?" she inquired, still advancing. "You might have killed me, young man." She stood still, a carpet-bag in one hand half-hidden in the folds of her skirts.

"I apologize." Tamlin came nearer. He grinned. "Just a gesture of annoyance. Childish of me, I agree."

"Well, you ought not to." Mrs. Daffin paused defensively and looked around her.

"Were you by any chance rabbiting?" he inquired.

"Rabbiting! Me!" Mrs. Daffin bridled, then caught the young man's eye and paused. "I could do with a rabbit

now and then though. Or two. One rabbit's no good." She changed the bag furtively from one hand to the other as she spoke, and a jay from a tree above her head let down a small blue and black barred feather upon Tamlin's coat.

"I prefer steak myself," he said. "Or ham and eggs."

"Would you like two eggs? I could let you have a couple of eggs with pleasure," Mrs. Daffin said briskly, scanning his face, then looking away. For you do need a bit of feeding up, you do, she thought.

The two came on together, Mrs. Daffin treading heavily and carefully, Tamlin carrying the bag, and every now and then, as though for pleasure, weighing it in one hand.

"I've got a boy in the Munster Fusiliers," Mrs. Daffin informed him. "Irish regiment that is. Though we're not Irish and don't want to be."

"Called the Dirty Shirts." Tamlin swung the bag gently in his other hand.

"Seems as if you boys have to call yourselves names," Mrs. Daffin said.

"An inverted compliment, I assure you," Tamlin said.

"I know what you mean. You mean it's the other way round. Here we are," Mrs. Daffin said, and paused.

Having arrived at her garden gate she held it open while Tamlin went through. "Now you can put them rabbits down," she said at her door. "For rabbits it is. Of course all the while you knew that. I see it in your eye. Though not knowing you I wasn't going to say so until we got home."

"Is it hush-money I'm to have?" Tamlin said.

"I'm giving you two eggs, what I said." Mrs. Daffin was kind and tart.

She handed over the two eggs in a paper bag. "You want more than two eggs, you do, to look what you should." And to be put to bed early and have plenty of sleep, she thought, scanning his face once more. "Would it be a long time back since I saw you?" she asked.

"Several years. Thank you for the eggs." Tamlin turned formal and went then.

Mrs. Daffin addressed herself: "That's put you in your place, Grace, my girl, for asking questions about what don't concern you." With an odd mingling of curiosity and pity she stood at her gate and watched the young man go. And no more war—that's what he wants. That last is what a good many wants. But what can I do? Shutting the door of the house behind her as if she were shutting something out from her own mind she went in.

CHAPTER THREE

TAMLIN AND BARBARA NANCY

SPRING wore on into summer, and for all the abruptness of his first departure Tamlin came repeatedly to the Furnesses. As if he were the Fisherman or Henry, he would enter unannounced. Unlike them, he had never very much to say. Only now and then, when the horse-brake containing the Sigbarrow and Alne cricket eleven, of which Edward Furness had once been captain, drew up at the door, and a chosen few came tumbling out, and the cask of damson wine plentifully laced with brandy and kept specially for these occasions, was broached, and talk grew high, Tamlin's voice, raised in argument or protest, might be heard. "There Tamlin is, tossing and goring them," Barbara Nancy would say.

But these were masculine occasions, from which both she and her mother willingly absented themselves in order to enjoy a little female quiet in the parlour. Here scarcely a sound reached them; nothing more tangible than whiffs of tobacco smoke that, pungent and faintly blue, wreathed themselves in Bacchus-shapes about the white ceilings, or

were carried, fainter still, to wait with the beeswax and turpentine smell in the square of darkness at the head of the stairs. At midnight or thereabouts, to an outburst of renewed boisterousness, the cricketers would take their leave. And Tamlin, turned solitary once more, would unhitch his horse from its tether under the lime tree. Clip, clop, the hoofs of his horse would go over the tarred surface, then softer and softer still on the grass verge, until the road, no one coming, no one going, was silent again, except for the brown owls hooting over the field and the sleepy stir of the sparrows in the tangle of clematis under the house eaves. Then, and only then, would Barbara Nancy fall asleep.

Tamlin would stay away for a week or longer without any explanation being given or sought. Inevitably, as if he had never been absent—they came to expect this also—he would come again. "He's one that likes his own quiet," Mrs. Fairey said. And Margaret would think silently: Tamlin is moody still. Meanwhile not one of the Furnesses visited the cottage or the wood, or intruded in any way upon the young man's peace. Henry, however, could not resist giving the cottage and the wood a name. Tamlin's Lamasery, he called them, and this Mrs. Fairey translated less subtly, but more understandably, into Mr. Tamlin's Misery. "No," Tamlin said, and shared the joke, "it is Tamlin's Retreat."

The Fisherman, leaning on a stick and looking strangely hollowed and bent, came on sick leave. Tamlin and he went about together a great deal, and Henry joined himself to them; together the three formed a conspiracy from which Barbara Nancy and her mother were alike shut out.

In these days mother and daughter, except on this one matter of Tamlin, were drawn closer together. They talked almost as equals: after the fashion of equals a great deal more was understood between them than ever was said.

Occasionally, and here Margaret was always the first to do so, they would speak of Tamlin. "Of course," Margaret would say thoughtfully, "Tamlin is unusual for Sigbarrow and Alne. Though I understand him better now." Barbara Nancy would answer her mother's thoughts more than her words. "He is arrogant," she would say with one of her clear looks, "and he thinks first of himself." She would pause. "But that is all." If the discussion were pressed beyond this point she would continue to look frowning and concentrated. "How can one ever get to know Tamlin?" her mother might ask. Barbara Nancy would answer confidently, "I think one can. Oh, I think so."

To-day the wind ruffled the lime trees; a bumble bee tossed in at the window and lit grumblingly on the tall red and yellow tulips in the blue bowl.

"A bumble bee means a stranger. That is Tamlin." Barbara Nancy examined the toes of her shoes. If it was not wartime I would have brown and white calf. If I had forty-two shillings, wartime or no wartime, I would still have brown and white calf. She looked outside. The skies were a high deep blue, upon them floated tall clouds that towered like icebergs, and small faintly-darkening islands of cloud like ice-floes; the grass in the meadow, which was almost ripe for cutting, streamed from green to bronze to lilac, changing always with each wave of light and air, and the red tasselled heads of the green sorrel fretted and tossed, harnessing as it were the waves of light. A smothered whirr came from the clock on the wall. Barbara Nancy sighed.

Margaret looked up. "The clock needs winding. Wind it, and time will go faster." She spoke smilingly.

In half an hour, in exactly not more than thirty minutes, Barbara Nancy told herself. She did not finish her thought. Having wound the clock and laid her ear to the ivory-coloured face, she sat down once more.

"It's going," she said.

"Didn't I tell you?" Margaret stroked the fine seam she

was sewing and bent her head over it. How odd, her thoughts went, if after all these years Kate Furness should reach out a hand through Tamlin and Barbara Nancy and touch me.

She spoke aloud. "Kate—Tamlin was Kate's adopted son, of course—and I were rivals once. There was a kind of silent war between us."

Barbara Nancy came out of a somewhat frowning concentration upon people in general and people in particular. There was the tiresomeness, she had been telling herself, of having to think so much about people and there was the horrid attraction nevertheless of thinking about people.

"It's hateful, that rivalry. I know," she said. As if there were claws at one's finger ends, she thought, as if one were a lady cat arching one's back on a wall.

"There is love at first sight. And there is the opposite." Margaret spoke tranquilly. "And they both last. What is the use of pretending otherwise?" She allowed her hands to lie idle in her lap for a moment. "I have remembered Kate all these years. And I have always remembered that first encounter of mine with Tamlin."

Barbara Nancy got to her feet. "I used to discuss Tamlin. Now for some reason I don't wish to discuss him." She moved towards the door.

"Then certainly we won't discuss him," just as tranquilly her mother said.

"You don't really like him." Barbara Nancy tossed the words over her shoulder.

Margaret looked up. "That is true." And yet it was not altogether true, she thought. Liking and disliking were not simple things.

Why dislike people, why? Barbara Nancy slid first one foot on the carpet, then the other, while looking down at both.

"That is what you used to do years ago when I annoyed you," her mother said. She waited. "Does it matter so

much about Tamlin?" Her look was warm now and full.

"No," Barbara Nancy said. She was silent then. That is not the point, she wished to say. Your dislike spoils things for me. You make everything very difficult between Tamlin and me. But still, obstinately, she did not speak.

"Must we quarrel? About Tamlin or about anything?" her mother said.

"I can't help disagreeing sometimes. I don't think I quarrel," Barbara Nancy said. Touching one piece of furniture after another, something of her mother's inflexibility about her, she walked slowly away.

"After all," Tamlin remarked lazily some ten minutes afterwards, "being out of love should mean the same as a rest."

"What Henry liked about Miss Bathurst so much were those green trouser-things she wore. She still wears them," Barbara Nancy said.

They were unable to discuss Henry's affairs of the heart further, nor had Barbara Nancy time to reflect on Tamlin's last remark, for at that moment the Metal Box Company's lorry drew up silently beside them. The lorry driver thrust a head out of his cabin window. "You two wanting a lift?"

"Yes. No. Yes." Tamlin was plainly in two minds.

"Where shall I put you down?" the driver inquired presently. He was friendly and quiet. He had blue eyes and a fixed look in them and a livid patched face.

"At the top of the hill," Tamlin said. "Do you do this trip often?"

"Morning, noon and night, you might say. Three times daily," the lorry driver said. "Ah, but I've got a new job coming." He turned a corner skilfully. "Volunteered for it. A war job proper. Driving dynamite."

"I don't envy you," Tamlin said.

"When you've got a heart like mine you've been carrying

dynamite about with you a few years. No future in that," the driver said.

"None," Tamlin agreed.

"You in the army? I see you are by your khaki tie. You're in the same boat," the driver said.

They climbed the hill. "You can laugh about it if you like. Or you can take it solemn and serious," the driver said.

"Oh, laugh," Tamlin said.

"That's right," the driver, all very solemnly, agreed.

The lorry came to a standstill. "Good luck, mates." The driver waved them off.

"Good luck," they said.

Barbara Nancy looked at Tamlin. "No future? As if time stopped," she said.

"Well, doesn't it, in a way?" he answered. "There's to-day, of course, and yesterday. But not to-morrow. No looking forward. Take me," he said, "my case is typical enough. Three-quarters of the men I used to know have been killed, perhaps more than three-quarters by this time. I haven't the guts to look forward, I haven't the heart any longer—for that's what looking forward means at my age—to be in love. Love belongs to happy endings, doesn't it? To the future anyway. And the future's a far country. When I go back I'll be a soldier again; I can't settle to be a man as well." He paused. "If you like, I'm restless, out of joint with the world and with myself. What more can anyone expect? I get broody, I get introspective about it all sometimes. But this may be all incomprehensible to you. I'll stop soon. Really, Barbara Nancy, there are times when I'd like to live on an island that's uninhabited. Not even a Man Friday in sight, nor even the ship's cat. Nothing more sociable than green leaves." Almost he laughed at her.

"Your cottage in the wood is almost that," Barbara Nancy said. She stayed solemn and reproving a little and troubled also.

Tamlin spoke gently. "It is quite simple really. A man

gets used up in so much fighting, he becomes emptied—it feels like that for a time—emptied of everything. And any sort of vision of things goes with the zest. The war is no crusade for me any longer. It's a job in hand. An unpleasant job on the whole. It's a test for me, that's all, with possibly something useful at the end, useful for humanity, I suppose. Though I'm sceptical of all that again. I'm not backing out, don't think it." He spoke slowly now. "But if my will, or some subconscious part of it, had not failed to some extent, I could scarcely be here. I should have recovered by this time. I should be back in France. I shouldn't be talking like this either, or thinking like it; I should not have been ordered quiet and rest. For I hate quiet and rest. I hate to admit that they are necessary, that they apply to me. And I hate, I hate most of all, to think I wasn't quite up to what I expected of myself." His voice was tense for a moment. He was silent then, and Barbara Nancy, while she sought painfully in her mind for something to say, was silent too.

While she waited she remembered how the Fisherman had said that Tamlin lay out in no man's land for a long time with a hole in his head, raving sometimes and sane sometimes, and, while he was sane, dead scared of going mad.

"Oh, to hell with it," Tamlin said then, very brief and bland once more. He smiled at her, a quick disarming smile. "Now you know."

They went on for a little way in silence again and then Tamlin, as if he did not wish to be silent too long, said: "When do you think this habit of picnicking began?"

Barbara Nancy answered at random. "With Horace Walpole and Strawberry Hill perhaps."

Tamlin laughed openly at her now. "That was prompt," he said.

He halted at a gate on their left. "Will this do? You did say this would do?" They went inside.

The field before them was bending and white-starred with

moon daisies and waving with ragged robin. Several great trees bounded the field and here the thick grass, unbroken by any flowers, was patterned with faintly swaying shadows.

Tamlin flung himself down under the centre tree of three elms and tilted his cap over his eyes.

A small wind was moving intimately about, ruffling the grasses, slipping along the line of hedge, moving the shadows, never going out of sight, never coming very near. Again and again the wind came, gently touching the grasses, following like a bird the same paths in the air. Her hands lightly clasped in her lap, Barbara Nancy sat beside Tamlin. Nothing appeared urgent any longer or confused. Gradually her thoughts of Tamlin, of herself, of life, the world, once more fell into place.

Tamlin looked at her. Her face was a clear pink, her mouth firm and full; the sun shining through the interlacing boughs gave new life to all the bright threads in the dark bronze of her hair.

Made acutely aware of herself she changed colour then.

Tamlin sat up suddenly. "Damn it, it's not fair," he said.

What isn't fair? she wished to ask. With an effort she turned her head.

"Not fair that you should be so beautifully undisturbed," Tamlin said.

"I'm not," she said. With difficulty she took her eyes away.

"Then what do we do about each other?" Tamlin spoke with a suppressed irritable impatience. "We are in love, aren't we? Or perhaps it's not love. It is certainly not the love that the seas won't drown. But we appear to need each other. And it seems as normal and natural for us to be together as talking or breathing. And we've a queer understanding of each other that stops short somehow of what is satisfying. And no one else has ever made me feel quite the same. I am all the time annoyed by you, or feeling tender and more than tender towards you. But there's no

awful compulsion about it, no magic either. It's a problem really, a complication, and, I should say, thoroughly modern. What do we do about it?"

Barbara Nancy was angry. As yet she scarcely knew why. She spoke quickly. "You and I?" she said. "We discuss it, of course, until it isn't there."

Tamlin stared. "There are other ways."

"I can't think of one."

"You are being childish and romantic. Or worse." Tamlin leaned his head as though indifferently upon one arm.

Outraged feelings overflowed in Barbara Nancy then. She got to her feet. She spoke incoherently. "I should like to fall in love completely or not at all."

"What a little silly you are," she heard Tamlin say.

She found a remote corner of the field and sat down in it. The grasses and all the flowers ran together and were as though misted over suddenly. How old does he think I am? Must I know everything? She spoke aloud. She addressed herself. "You come out with Tamlin, and this is what happens. This. You are laughed at, then proposed to in a way that is not being proposed to; then, before you have even been consulted, you are refused." She struck her heel sharply into the ground. From the shock and bruising that followed, her mind cooled, the field cleared miraculously again. What did you want? she asked herself. At the realization of the romance she had rehearsed to herself, the protestations that even now she would have welcomed, her cheeks burned once more. Tamlin, who knows everything about me, who can so often guess what is in my mind, knows this too.

Since her fingers needed to be occupied she began to pick the moon daisies that grew around her, and as absently to thread them into a chain. I've forgotten how, her mind went. But the chain took shape under her fingers. Gradually any sense of injury she may have felt receded. Here was the

sun warm on her face, and the larks singing high over the corn, and the wind dipping here, dipping there over the tops of the grasses—it was impossible to be affronted or annoyed.

By stages she felt cool and lofty and detached, and deceptively brimful of philosophy. Why should anyone wish to be loved? Really, love presents too many problems, love is too great an interference, she thought.

Tamlin found her some little time afterwards, a peaceful picture enough, head bent, completing a long daisy-chain.

"Enough for seven Dick Whittingtons, Lord Mayors of London." She held up the chain. She looked at the young man without embarrassment, without, it seemed to him, any very lively recollection of what had passed.

I am not apologizing; I never apologize, I have nothing to apologize for, Tamlin's face very clearly said.

"Must I come now?" She gathered her possessions together. "Have you eaten your lunch? I've eaten mine."

"I have." He grinned unexpectedly, then, as hastily as if he were correcting an error, immediately and for the second time looked glum. "I hoped you would choose to go hungry in order to punish me. I shouldn't have been punished," he said.

"Losing my temper always gives me a very good appetite," she said.

She came on with him out of the field. By the gate she turned and bade a silent goodbye to the three elm trees and the spot where she had felt philosophical, and dismissed love, and made daisy-chains: three things, not one of which she would ever, she was convinced, do again.

Tamlin kept up an appearance of ironic detachment for the greater part of the way back. He walked on one side of the road, she walked on the other.

"Better take off that daisy-chain. Looks a bit ridiculous," at last he said with what was an obvious effort at tolerance just as they were coming into Alne.

"Oh, but I like it." She patted the chain which she still wore round one arm.

"What a child you are," Tamlin said impatiently again.

"But a nice child." Barbara Nancy skipped as she spoke from the edge of the grass verge to the road below.

"I am not so sure. And why are you being coquettish? The Lord deliver me from coquettish women." Tamlin turned suddenly thunderous and left her then.

She did not even look back. Tamlin always came with them, she remembered. Tamlin always went off like that. She sighed. Now that it had served its purpose, which was to annoy Tamlin, she hung the daisy-chain upon a post like a May Day garland and came into the house.

Her mother gave only the merest glance over her sewing as Barbara Nancy came in. "Another of Tamlin's moods?" she said, snipping off a length of thread with her scissors as she spoke.

Barbara Nancy thought carefully for a moment. "Not another. Really I think the same one," she said.

It was fine August weather: the air was milky-warm and still. Everywhere the corn, ripening to harvest, stood in the fields: oats were paper-white, wheat a warm gold, barley was russet-yellow, threaded with copper, threaded with rust. Every now and then a pointed yellowing leaf fell from the willows by the river, to be caught, an Egyptian boat, among the water-lilies, or to move in swifter and swifter eddies downstream.

The war grew harder, longer. Verdun and the slaughter of the Chemin des Dames were psat; the even greater slaughter of Passchendaele had begun; in the time between lay the Italian disaster at Caporetto and the British victory, if anything so costly could be called a victory, at Messines. And Tamlin still lived at the cottage near the wood and came as frequently as ever to the Furnesses' house. In these days the look of strain had almost gone from his face; he

appeared less self-absorbed, easier in manner and in mind. He cracked jokes now and then with a familiarity he had never shown before, small foolish jokes of which Henry would have been proud, that had none of the old bitter ring. He made no more long speeches; he did not again refer to the war or to himself. To Barbara Nancy, seated in the crook of the Pond Seedling plum tree in the Furnesses' garden, he had only this moment declared that she appeared to have an infinite capacity for taking plums.

It was true. She herself admitted that, with a break for lunch, she had been in the tree for as long as the starlings had been in the one opposite, from roughly eleven o'clock, that was, until half-past three.

She propped a slender volume of Miss Austen's before her between two small boughs. "Of all the impossible prigs," she declared, and, reaching up, she helped herself to yet another plum.

"Who now?" Tamlin asked.

"Mr. Knightley."

"Balance is everything," Tamlin declared from his place astride a neighbouring bough. "Where did we get to last time?" he inquired, looking intently at Barbara Nancy in her old blue and white crocus-striped frock amid the red bunches of fruit and the yellowing plum leaves.

She dropped Miss Austen's *Emma* into her pocket and flicked away a wasp. "I remember. You were certain that after the war everyone of any intelligence would realize that the Liberal Party was completely ossified. And you declared that Brock was continually harping on the same personal string. Too much *vox humana* always about him, you said." She paused. "I didn't know," she remarked innocently, "that *vox humana* had anything to do with harps."

"The best metaphors are always mixed, like the best races," Tamlin said.

"How preposterous you are!" Barbara Nancy bent her head.

"Well, now," Tamlin said, "how is he, young Doddington? You've heard from him how many times since he went out?"

"Twelve letters and four service postcards," Barbara Nancy said. "Why do you ask?"

"I shan't write to you," Tamlin said. "I don't write letters, as you know." He swung himself to the ground and leaned against the tree. "No one at Thwaites ever wrote letters very much. When we were all children Kate decided to take us away for the holidays. She took us to Scarborough. John wrote to her once. Kate was delighted. 'Here's actually a letter from your father,' she said."

"Would she have liked me?" Barbara Nancy spoke her thoughts, and her doubts also, aloud.

Tamlin waited a moment, his head thrown back, looking up at the leaves of the tree. "She would have liked you. She would always have liked what I like," he said.

Barbara Nancy leaned over her particular branch of the tree and looked down and spoke quickly. "I have always wished I could have known her. Do I have to jump?" There, six feet below, the ladder lay upon its back.

"What? Oh, I'll catch you," Tamlin said.

In the next moment he held a somewhat breathless Barbara Nancy by the shoulders. "Why couldn't you wait?"

Through a number of pleasant and alarming sensations she yet managed to speak. "I didn't promise to wait."

He leaned once more against the tree. "What about coming to the cottage one evening? You promised me that."

"Did I?" She looked doubtful.

"I want you to come."

She was caught in his look, held in it for a second.

"To-morrow?" he said.

"Not to-morrow." She spoke hastily.

"Then Wednesday."

She nodded, seeing only Tamlin, not seeing him very well.

He turned his head. "Brace yourself, Tamlin. Here's Margaret," she heard him say.

Suddenly and briskly she returned to herself. "I shall have to tell them."

"Of course," Tamlin said.

Her mother stood at the end of the garden where the short flight of steps began, and waited, a look of anxiety and knowledge, both intuitive, and something else that was swift and passing, that Barbara Nancy scarcely caught before it was gone, that resembled envy, upon her face.

"Will you be late?" Margaret asked in carefully neutral tones when they were setting out for the cottage.

"If we are going to the cottage of course we shall be late." Barbara Nancy spoke patiently.

Her father looked up from his book. "Isn't Henry coming with you?"

Barbara Nancy shook her head twice, slowly. She looked at Tamlin, who, with faintly raised eyebrows, looked back again. "Plom said, didn't he?"—here she appealed to Tamlin—"that he'd be shot before he'd travel so far simply to look at a wood."

Her father laughed in his smothered fashion, Tamlin laughed with him. But her mother said, "Oh, Henry!" as vexed as if he were there.

Her father waved his hand, still laughing. "Be off then, both of you, and allow us some peace." But Margaret smiled stiffly and bent over her letter-writing and did not speak.

Barbara Nancy turned as she left the room. Her mother's trim back in the flowered gown, the piled grey hair, might have belonged to a stranger. She's against Tamlin and me; she will never change. I must belong to her always; I must never belong to myself, her thoughts went.

"Sarah," Margaret wrote, her pen moving fast over the page, "Barbara Nancy has altered so much she might, I

feel sometimes, be your daughter as much as mine." She paused. The words themselves accused her, so black on the white page. "But then," she wrote again, "I suppose I want her to be a child always, and that, I know, dear Sarah, is foolish of me as well as unmodern, something"—here Margaret's pen once more ran on ahead—"no mother must ever be." As though in alarm she paused once more. Very quickly she began another paragraph. "Life here, like the war, goes on."

Barbara Nancy and Tamlin turned the corner of the lane, Tamlin looking satirical and a shade grim as well.

"I am not popular with your mother, but then we knew that," he said.

"A number of different things are at work in her," Barbara Nancy said after a moment.

"Well, obviously."

"Once I thought chiefly of her. Now, quite often, I oppose her. Now I want things for myself," she said.

"Do you? And she blames me." Tamlin was ironical still.

"She doesn't think clearly, she merely feels," Barbara Nancy said. "She is possessive in an odd way. We may all do as we please. She would never prevent us from doing as we please. But we must love no one but her. We must love no one so well as we love her."

Tamlin did not speak.

"Perhaps she has had too much love," Barbara Nancy said. "Perhaps she has been a little spoilt always."

It was at this point that a sudden constraint fell upon her. I am always talking of love; I suppose I am always thinking of love. That last time when Tamlin and I were together we discussed love. She remembered the last time. Parents can make one uncomfortable at almost any age, she wished to say. On second thoughts the words had too hasty and shallow a ring. She suppressed them therefore.

Tamlin was silent also for parallel reasons which were

perfectly clear to him, but which were obviously lost upon Barbara Nancy. She remained, he felt, for all the streak of wisdom in her, irritatingly and incorrigibly young. Her mind, he was convinced, was as empty as that of an intelligent young woman could very well be. Had Barbara Nancy ever thought of passion, ever imagined herself, except in the most remote and therefore romantic fashion, in love? What he took to be her inexperience, while it moved him to a rare tenderness, alarmed him also. His thoughts became tinged with desperation now. I shall never be able to talk to her on equal terms; I shall never be able to show her what is in my mind. He looked at her. She was walking on the other side of the road, trailing a hand over the heads of the tall cow parsley as she passed and looking intent and absorbed.

Here, as usual, is Tamlin wanting me and not wanting me, she was thinking. Because she would not allow herself to appear hurt she went on trailing a hand over the tops of the tall grasses, while Tamlin, shoulders slightly hunched, walked in the middle of the road.

On a sudden impulse she joined him.

"What were you thinking over on the other side?" he asked.

"I was thinking"—she made a vague gesture—"here is another of Tamlin's moods, why?"

"Am I so moody? Perhaps I am being serious for the first time," he said.

"I am almost always serious," she said.

"You should be less serious, among other things, I think," he said.

"I like myself very well as I am," she said.

At the foot of the hill a path branched off to the left beside the wood. It was here that Tamlin's horse, a roan with white stockings, was waiting. They set off together, Barbara Nancy seated, pillion fashion, in front. Whether it was the young man's arm about her, or the quietness of

the sky over them, she did not know, but there was nothing irksome any longer, it seemed to her, in the silence that they kept. They were together now. In some strange way they were committed to each other. Within the half-circle of Tamlin's arm she did not speak.

"Now we shall have everything to ourselves," Tamlin said. For a change had come over his mood also. Leave it, leave everything, his mind went.

He urged his horse forward under the sun's glimmer of gold on the lime leaves, over the thin burnt carpet of the dead lime flowers. The sun was molten and staring like another world in a sea of fire, and in the sky before them narrow wings of apricot-coloured cloud slanted steeply down. From the Dutch barn on their right a bat veered and turned, spinning like a leaf in the air. They could see the delicate web of wings, coloured a dusky rose, outspread for a moment against the light. Then, turning swifter than any leaf, a moment later the bat was part once more of the shadow of the barn.

"How far did you say?" Barbara Nancy asked.

"Not far." Tamlin's arm tightened as though unconsciously about her.

"Do you remember that first time we were together?" he went on. "There was the woman with the lighted candle in her hand moving from room to room of the house on the moor." He looked down at Barbara Nancy. "When we met again in the wood I was sick and sour. You felt that?"

"I felt that in the end," Barbara Nancy said, and stirred.

"Off and on I've wanted you to come here ever since. Only you. But it was off and on. Gradually I became more sure. I'm certain now. Certain of a number of things, certain of what I want," Tamlin said. "All the same I panicked a short while back. did you feel that too?"

"Yes," she said again.

Tamlin went on: "I can't be made responsible, I said."

"You don't have to be responsible for me," she said.

"But I must. That or nothing, I feel. Suppose it is nothing?" he said.

Here he left the path and rode along the edge of the cornfield, for at this point an avenue of thorn trees arched over, making a tunnelled bower of shade through which horse and rider could not pass. The light, at its gentlest now, was falling and shadowed on the bending ears of corn, on the tangle of grass blades; the dry ditch that stretched before them like another path was awash with flowers: purple scabious, pink campion and meadowsweet. There was still the narrow way of apricot-coloured cloud before them in the sky. But the sky had changed; it appeared to lean closer to earth, to have taken on something of the colour and texture of night.

Nothing definite, nothing certain in his mind, that is what Tamlin means. Barbara Nancy looked straight before her. The shadows, she told herself, grow like flowers under the trees. It was a poetical enough thought, but not quite true, she realized, in prose.

"That other time was goodbye too," Tamlin said.

She looked up then.

"I'm going back. I am fit again," he said. "I am off to-morrow, back to the battalion."

For a moment she was only half-comprehending. For a few moments more her mind stayed troubled and confused. Now there are all shadows, dark stains of shadow, she thought again, spreading under the trees. She put out a hand and touched Tamlin's arm.

"I'm here," he said as if he were comforting her.

He waited, then spoke again. "I've never liked a thing that drags on, that's neither here nor there. I'll get it over, this going back. I'll get everything over, everything but the one thing."

What one thing is that? she wished, but did not care, to ask. It might be something quite different from what is

between Tamlin and myself; it might be something quite impersonal, she thought.

They rode downhill beside skeleton ash trees that, stripped of bark and leaves, showed bleached and ivory-white like bone. Tamlin reined in his horse. He pointed. "There are the woods. The cottage—you won't see it yet—is somewhere between." As they came nearer the woods showed solid and dark, no light on the tree trunks, scarcely a reflection of light on the still leaves.

Tamlin bent his head. His hands touched her throat, turned her face to his. He kissed her then. "This is not goodbye—yet," he said. He stooped lower until his lips touched her throat. For what was no more than a moment, for what seemed a long time, he stayed like that.

Barbara Nancy put her hand to his hair uncertainly once, then again. He straightened then.

"If I said I believe I love you—one has to be so plain with you—would you understand?"

Tamlin only believes he loves, she thought. She spoke then: "Tamlin, how can one be certain?"

"You want everything certain where nothing is certain." He spoke flatly. He allowed the arm that had been round her to hang by his side. "I can't love you as I mean love. I am not free to do that, not free even in my mind. I can't leave you easily either. Surely you know that? Or is it that you can't understand?"

There Tamlin goes, being impatient, being uncomprehending again, she thought in a tired fashion. She felt no resentment, only a confused pain for him and for herself, for the invisible walls, for so they seemed, of temperament and will that always seemed to rise up and divide them, and a dread of to-morrow that was almost here.

"I never intended things to go like this," Tamlin said. "I wanted to be certain of myself before I spoke. I wanted you to be certain of yourself as well. But there's no time now. There's no time left."

"I don't mind how things have gone. How things have gone makes no difference," Barbara Nancy said.

"So much talk," Tamlin said.

They rode over the stubble between the leaning shucks of corn under a sky that was blue-green, under a moon that showed milky and pale. And always the shadows grew about their feet: the faint weaving shadow branches of the trees, the still heavy shadows of the leaning sheaves. The scents were out too, like the moths—the scent of honeysuckle, of traveller's joy, of dew on the grass. It was as though they rode down a long tunnel of scent to the heart of a flower. And night seemed to wait for them there, under the hills towards which they rode, at the woodside.

"I can't ask for anything now," Tamlin said again. Now he spoke with an odd violence that held in it something resembling despair. And yet he was not one normally to despair.

From compassion Barbara Nancy forgot all that she desired of certainty for herself. Her hand touching his for a moment, she asked: "What is it you want?"

"Does it matter what I want?" he said.

Here is Tamlin rejecting me, rejecting everything, she thought. She took away her hand.

"Are you angry?" He stooped to her, remorseful suddenly.

She spoke simply. "I am never angry with you for long." She leaned her head against him. She closed her eyes.

"Stay like that," he said.

A second later, or so it seemed, "You can see the place now," Tamlin said.

The cottage, which was trim and small, the moonlight glittering on the diamond panes of the windows, stood on a plot of rising ground between the woods.

"We must go through the wood to the clearing. There's no entrance here," Tamlin said.

They rode on a little way. Presently the dark mass of the wood was close upon them, the gate was a green blur, the dim separate shapes of the trees trod close together, the drive stretched shadowy and as though limitless between the trees. They went on through the wood. It grew denser, darker. The scents of the pine trees, of moss and damp leaves, the faint honeysuckle trails, the rank animal smells, the whiff of carrion—for that, too, was there—met them at every turn and lingered all but tangibly in the moist air. The trees, most of them young oak trees, their branches like strong lattice work against the moon, were living presences; moonlight was mirrored, magical, green-dark upon the leaves. It was deep dusk where they rode; there was the bland moon pallor overhead, a moonlit twilight between them on either hand, between the round shafts of the trees.

Barbara Nancy murmured to herself. Tamlin stooped his head. "You said something?"

"Nothing." Half-shamefaced for a moment she turned away so that his lips no more than brushed her cheek.

"I was thinking, I was remembering," she said. "I was remembering: 'I am in deep woods, Between the two twilights.'"

He stooped to her suddenly. "Too deep. Too dark. I can't see you. I can't find you," he said.

And Barbara Nancy answered him, "Oh, Tamlin, Tamlin." With a small passionate movement she clung to him then. Now for an instant it was as if nothing divided them, as if there were no war in the world.

They rode slowly back. The moon, moving inconstantly between clouds, kept them company. The trees were drooping and dark, earth was nebulous, vanishing, itself a misty star or the moon's broad shadow.

The silence between them now was complete as though there were no more questions between them, as though the confusion of mind they both had felt were at last spent.

There was only this moment of time for them: it was theirs for ever, nothing could take it away. And the shadows and the leaning corn, and the dark wood, even the new creeping tide of the mists flowing in towards morning seemed to belong to them too. But not to-morrow. To-morrow was different; to-morrow was indeed another day.

Tamlin reined in his horse and stooped to her and spoke gently. "This is to-morrow. And perhaps this is goodbye."

As he spoke Barbara Nancy looked back along the way they had come. The woods still showed dark; behind them a faint silver-white rim of light lined the furthest edge of the sky. The night ended there. It had begun with the sun setting in gold on the lime leaves.

Sound carries far on a still night. The two sounds, heard perhaps in the same moment, drew nearer together: the hard quick ring of hooves, and the stroke of Edward Furness's ferruled stick on the flints of the road. Each sound could be distinguished now. Presently the trim shape of the mare showed and Tamlin's head, dark in the light. Now Edward Furness, broad-shouldered and erect, came into view. He was lifting his stick high as he walked, then bringing it, like a man who was angry, sharply down.

"To the devil with you, Tamlin," he called out before they met. He waved his stick; once more he brought it sharply down.

"There's a devil in it for me too," Tamlin called out, unabashed. He halted then.

Barbara Nancy slipped from the circle of Tamlin's arm. "Tamlin is leaving." She spoke breathlessly.

"Why couldn't you say you were leaving?" Once more her father addressed Tamlin.

"I preferred to forget it." Tamlin sounded impatient suddenly. He gathered the reins in both hands. "Goodbye and thank you," he said. He stayed like that for a moment, then turned.

"Goodbye," her father said. As if he relented he spoke again. "Good luck," he said.

Not looking at her, Tamlin rode away. She watched him go, a dim shape first seen, then lost, then seen again under the trees. Where the lane curved he waved to them. A second later he was lost to sight. Now only the sound of hooves could be heard, sharp, then not so sharp, then receding on the road. Though Barbara Nancy strained her ears no sound reached her now.

She turned to her father. "No one need worry about me, no one," she said.

"What's Tamlin to you?" her father said, his voice rough.

She waited, looking for an answer in her own mind and finding none. "I wish I knew," at last she said. Her voice sounded small even in her own ears.

When they had returned her father spoke again. Locking the door, his back to her, he said, "Tamlin's not easy. Tamlin will never be easy. Remember that."

She took the edges of her father's coat in both hands and bent her head between. "Don't speak to me. Don't say any more."

"Only the one thing, only this," her father said, as she turned towards the stairs. "Never think, Barbara Nancy, that you can go against the world."

Tamlin and I are two people. Tamlin and I, if we wish, can be the world. Trailing her hand from tiredness up the long polished curve of the banisters, she climbed the stairs.

PART VIII

THE VIGIL

CHAPTER ONE

THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Now more than ever it was a race with time. Everyone, combatant and non-combatant alike, saw the struggle in the same terms: whether in this fourth year of war the western front could hold until the full tide of American help flowed in. There was scarcely a family in Britain which was not aware of the challenge. Even though so much had been given already, it was plain that nothing that still remained of work or sacrifice must be held back.

So, in the Furness household, in the last week of February 1918, Plompartay, cocking his new forage cap at a gay angle, went away as quietly as the Philosopher and the Fisherman had gone before him, only pausing as he did so to glance as though for the last time at the inscription, "Henry Furness, Royal Flying Corps," cut out in the beam above his bed.

The house seemed trebly quiet now that the three of them were gone. Margaret stood at her window looking out at the field and the elm trees and the row of limes. In these days there was time to pause between one thing and the next; there was time to wait. All the years of coming and going, of foolish merry talk and sudden laughter, were wiped out, it seemed to her now. And the house had come back to itself; the house was a shell again as she had known it first, tenantless, but echoing still, as an empty shell at a breath gives back again the sound of the sea. And now for her, for the three of them that were left, time was sus-

pended a little, and uncertain, like a pendulum which has all but ceased to swing.

It was early yet, the day hidden still. Anything—rain or snow or hail—might be held there, in the east, between the sun and the sky. Or the sun might shine, fitful and rather late, at four in the afternoon, painting faint lilac shades on the green-grey lichened boughs, quickening the red sealing-wax buds of the limes, opening the purple-stamened blossoms of the elm trees. And this year, as always since she came to Alne, a thrush would sing as though it were lord of the ash tree from the vast moving rigging of the boughs.

The postwoman halted outside the window, two letters in her hand. Margaret opened the window and took them. A letter from Yorkshire for Edward—she laid it on one side indifferently—and a circular. She dropped the circular by the pile of kindling wood beside the hearth.

"Colder," the postwoman said. She was cheerful and full of the weather always. "A bit of a frost coming up. None when I set out an hour ago." And she wheeled her bicycle on to the next house.

Mrs. Addis, the new rabbit-catcher's wife who was doing duty for Mrs. Fairey, came into the room.

"Frost!" she said, and swept deftly, so that ashes and dust flew willingly like sparks up the wide chimney, "Flora Gander knows not one mortal thing about frost. I went out not an hour since, and there was my dishcloth on the pig bucket, out all night, and soft as ever was in May."

Dishcloths and pig buckets, all the little village things, Margaret thought.

"Ho, love letters!" Mrs. Addis seized delightedly upon the scraps of torn circular in the hearth. "They'll burn, ure to," she said, and she set a match to the fire. "Young Mr. Doddington," she continued, sitting back on her heels, "home from the front, they say, and looking very well and mighty pleased with himself. But I've not seen him."

"Why shouldn't he be pleased with himself?" Margaret asked absently.

"You'll be seeing plenty of him, I dare say." Mrs. Addis scrambled to her feet. "Now look at them rooks," she said and pointed. "They're not a-setting out. There's meaning in this wind, I said yesterday, and it's no more frost than I am, it's just about to fall, and it's snow." Clanking like a stage knight with dustpan and shovel she left the room.

Margaret waited. The sun that an hour ago had glowed orange-red was veiled, was presently obscured. Tiny flakes of snow came first out of a grey belt of cloud, scurrying before the wind over the polished surface of the road, curling in small smoke-plumes and trails, dissolving, forming again, always following the same dancing motion. The snow scurry sped faster, the trails became small-crested waves, the waves met and were joined; now the road was a wide snow-covered shore, and still the sky was dense with snow.

Billy and Sally Fairclough, Rosa Fairey's children, carrying the family milk-can between them, passed the window, walking side by side.

"What is it?" Billy asked in his small, hoarse voice, halting and shuffling his feet, "what's it called, Sally?" He held one hand out as if to catch the snow; there was a small excited look on his face.

"Snow," Sally said, off-hand and brief. "Snow."

The two of them passed on.

Margaret retreated into the room and addressed Mrs. Addis, who had returned and was on her knees chasing a spider under the bookcase. "Has Rosa Fairey's new baby come yet, Mrs. Addis, do you know?"

"I'll have to leave the varmint be," Mrs. Addis said. "I never see such a house for livestock as this is." She emerged. "Rosa's got another boy, ma'am, another little soldier. Or another little sailor, I should say."

"I'll go and see her," Margaret said. "I must see her." She went out then.

"Anything to get herself out of the house these days, anything," Mrs. Addis said. Between understanding and disapproval she watched Margaret set off across the field to the Faireys' cottage, and as she did so the spider ran out from behind the bookshelf and sought and found a better place.

Rosa lay on the straw mattress on the bed that was large enough for three, the box encrusted with shells that she had treasured as a child beside her, the baby, smelling of milk and sleep, between. The room with its whitewashed walls, its scrubbed floors and rag rugs, showed cold and clean; outside the snow fell steadily. Behind the white flakes were the grey, and behind them, countless legions of flakes of snow. From the snow hush over everything the world seemed quiet; only the stamp of the horses could be heard from the stable next door, stamp, stamp, and again stamp. The rustle of snowflakes was quieter than any sound, piling up softly against the window, as if thousands of white geese came, Rosa thought, bringing each one its feather of snow. By contrast, and for one desolate moment, Sydney harbour and the hot southern sun seemed to her an eternity of time away. The sea was nowhere here; the sun wore grey petticoats: here in the heart of England was soft earth, green grass and trees for miles, and mist and rain over all. And now snow. Rosa shut her eyes, shutting out for a moment the unfamiliar whiteness; for a moment she was a sick traveller in a foreign country of snow. And suddenly, her eyes closed, she remembered how Johnny would come bursting in—he was never quiet, never slow—and the look, startled and always bold, on his face. His hands—a sailor's hands, used to women, used to ships—would turn her about. "See how you're made for me, just see," he would say. However angry and hard her mood, her lips would go soft under his, the words of reproach or anger die away on her tongue. A wave of weakness and longing mixed

burned for a moment in Rosa's face. If the way lay over nothing but land, no sea, I'd get up and find him now, her thoughts went.

As if so much passion were subtly communicated to him, Johnny's son wept fiercely then, and Mrs. Fairey came into the room.

"Hush now, don't you cry, don't you care," she said, a matter-of-fact passion about her as she rocked the child.

That is how she spoke to me. It might be me she is hushing, Rosa thought. Leaning on one elbow she said wildly:

"Isn't it queer that the child is his, that it looks like him when it's such a long time since I've seen him or even heard?"

"There, my love, hush," her mother said, still rocking the child. She half-turned. "You can be with a man five minutes, and his child will look like him all its life," she said.

"Even the back of his head. Oh, the big stupid," Rosa said, choking and turning her face suddenly into the pillow.

"Fairclough's not stupid. Better if he were," her mother said.

"Stupid for not knowing what he's got," Rosa said. She wept a little then, hard, bright tears that burned up sorrow and dried, smarting and salt, upon her cheeks.

"He'll never let himself be parted from you. He's not stupid enough for that," her mother said.

"If he'd leave me for good, I'd know then," Rosa said. "I'd spit on the thought of him then, I'd learn myself to, if he never came back."

"You're made as you are, Rosa. All your life wouldn't be enough time to forget him in and he knows it." Her mother went to the window and laid the child down once more upon the bed. In a different voice she said, looking out: "Here's Mrs. Furness coming for me, I'll go meet her." She left the room.

Rosa bent over the child and touched a finger to its lips.

"You little greedy mouth, you, you're like your dad, greedy, that's what you are," half-crying again, she said.

Mrs. Fairey came a few steps out of the house to meet Margaret. She spoke anxiously. "I've got Rosa upstairs crying for him in Australia or wherever Fairclough is, and Bridget Tufton in my kitchen all skeery and wild."

"I don't mind her," Margaret said. And, "Poor Rosa." She shook the snow from her cloak and followed Mrs. Fairey in.

Bridget got up slowly from her chair beside the fire. "When I see you I always see Anna with you," she said.

"I'm sorry," Margaret said and spoke gently.

Bridget came a step nearer.

"And when I see Jane Fairey I see Robert Tufton too. I see so many ghosts. But if you loved them, they say, the dead sleep."

"She can't help going on in that way, she can't, the poor creature, it's a way she's got," Mrs. Fairey said. She moved a chair needlessly in a vexed fashion nevertheless, and spoke again. "You don't have to start up and talk like that, Bridget, just because Mrs. Furness has come."

Rebuked and humbled a little, Bridget sat down once more and held her knees and stared into the fire.

"She's a poor thing now but no trouble," Mrs. Fairey said, and she shut the stair door firmly behind them and followed Margaret up towards Rosa's room once more.

Presently, over a cup of tea, Rosa's tears dry now, Australia forgotten, even John Fairclough forgotten for a moment, Mrs. Fairey said comfortably: "Arthur Fustin tells me he don't mind if Bridget does come here now and then, but he won't have her on the other side of his fire for good. Not for anything he won't have that, Arthur says."

"Then you are marrying Mr. Fustin?" Margaret said.

"I haven't said No, and I haven't said Yes," Mrs. Fairey answered with a small doubtful shake of her head.

"Keeping Arthur dangling," Rosa said, and she blew gently into the yellow fluff of hair on the child's head.

"Fustin's past all that foolishness," Mrs. Fairey remarked.

"Oh, is he?" Rosa began to laugh. "You think so," she said.

Her mother was scarcely listening. She paused. She inclined an ear. "Just listen to them two," she said in a pleased voice.

One step at a time Rosa's two elder children climbed the stairs.

"Me first," they heard Sally say. "Me. Wait."

"How's my baby?" she inquired, bursting in at the door and scrambling over the bed.

"Careful. Careful," her grandmother said.

"He's fine. See." Her mother exhibited the child.

Hands in his pockets, feet apart, a ball of snow fast melting on his tongue, small Johnny stood in the middle of the room. "It's nice," he pronounced. "You can eat it. It tastes sorter like ice-cream. It's snow."

Her goodbyes said, Margaret picked her way a few minutes afterwards over the snow-covered stable yard. The sky had emptied itself; the river, borne up like a swan's breast, moved slowly under its feathered cloak of snow. In an abstraction of thought so deep that she was scarcely conscious of thought at all, she moved on. She laid her hand on the gate, and at once the past, remote and yet near, was around her again in the familiar feel of the wood under her hand, in the curious warmth and stillness of the snow. Thought, and with it memory, were insistent now. Anna's hand had touched the gate how many times? And George Fairey, coming and going twice a day with his horses, how many times? And the Philosopher and countless hundreds more. Over what fields did George Fairey call his horses now? The wood, Mrs. Tufton's tracks showing like darker dints on the white surface of the snow, seemed remote from all the pain that had dwelt there once,

that for Bridget Tufton dwelt burningly there still. The leaves hear and feel, the earth listens, the trees know—all that was rational in Margaret thrust the thought aside. I am not Anna, she thought, I am not Bridget. And yet—all the joys and the pleasures, she thought again, all the years and the sorrows, does nothing remain of them, is all of it silence?

Shutting the gate behind her, the last of the snowflakes blind and melting on her face, she came slowly on.

CHAPTER TWO

BROCK DODDINGTON

BARBARA NANCY waited in the wood for Brock Doddington. It was afternoon. As so often happens in early spring the thaw had followed hard on the heels of the snow; there were pockets of warmth in the cold air, long shafts of sun and smoky lilac shadows between the trees. The wood was full of the low restless flight of birds: tiny tits and chaffinches in troupes and bands, flying in short flights from one tree to the next, the sun enamelling like jewels the bright colours of their breasts and wings, while with every flight they made a myriad iridescent drops shivered and flew with them from the trees.

As she waited some sort of resolution began to take shape in the mingled quiet and heaviness of her mind. No one should cherish unhappiness or longing; even regrets should be laid away. There could be no question of disloyalty here. What was between Tamlin and herself was no more than half-grown and half-expressed. "I make no promises," Tamlin had written before finally he left once more for France, "I can ask for none from you."

She took up a twig and half-absently wrote her name in

the snow at her feet. Not to send any word through all these weeks of bitter fighting—that may be Tamlin's way, she told herself, that is not mine. She looked down at the name she had written in the snow. Barbara Nancy Furness. For a moment it appeared like the name of a stranger. Drawing a finger of one gloved hand in a broad line through the letters, she tossed the twig away. I have always been too downright, too positive, I have always seen things as too black or too white. It may be I should decide nothing yet, I should be content to wait. But sometimes there are two loyalties, and one must choose not for oneself only. Before long I must choose for Brock Doddington as well as for myself. She stirred uneasily, for here, quite suddenly, she was faced with an uncomfortable finality.

Perhaps after all Tamlin had been wiser than she was, wiser in wishing to leave what was between them suspended, waiting for those better times that would come, that appeared far-off still.

Meanwhile, if I do not grow old, I grow older, she thought again; time changes me and time slips away. If I could I would put off deciding until Tamlin were certain in his mind, until this war were over, until Tamlin and peace returned. "I'll come back," he had said. He had, at least, promised her that. That was what they all promised, what they all wished, simply to come back. Tamlin and I are unimportant; there are millions like us, she thought suddenly again. She stayed quiet then. And the birds, like bright messengers of nothing, flying to nowhere, flew constantly between the trees, and the sun's shafts were tipped with lilac, and the melting snow fell steadily from the boughs in a broken chain of milky iridescent drops like beads.

Brock washed his hands a second time, straightened the set of his new tunic, pulled his tie, which even yet showed regrettable civilian tendencies, into place, and, one hand

on the curving banisters, the other in his trousers pocket, half-slid, half-ran down the stairs. The knob of the outer door, without any willing on his part, flew out of his hand, the door slammed behind him. He hesitated and looked back. Nothing to be done, he told himself guiltily, the door shut, the small half-curtain over the pane of glass in the door—Ellen would shroud everything—trembling still. Door knobs always flew out of his hand, doors banged behind him, gates once closed opened again, ties never stayed straight. All these are pointers to the sort of person I am, he thought cheerfully, and turned away. Slow, steady, sure—the country motto for a man—that is my father for all his faults; that, for all my virtues—I can boast some virtues—is what I shall never be. Still keeping one hand in his trousers pocket he came more slowly down the path.

That is Brock pounding downstairs, making the banisters creak, slamming my doors: Ellen, full of malice and longing, watched him go. She longed to be rid of all the conflicting sentiments he roused in her of liking and not liking, of friendliness and enmity. She was filled with longing and malice mixed that he was Seth's son, that she could never herself now have a son. That is one thing I can never do for Seth, never, she thought constantly.

She came out of the kitchen into the hall; she straightened the mat at the foot of the stairs; opening the door gently, she shut it even more gently again. Once more all of it was hers; once more she had called the house home to herself.

Bridget was stooping over the violet-roots at the garden's end. There were no long pointed buds to be seen as yet, only green leaves, curled tight like the chrysalids of butterflies, lying in the warm hollow of air between the thin crust of melting snow and the wet earth.

Brock would have passed her without speaking, but she straightened as he came, and, looking at him, held out her hand. A skeleton leaf lay there, the net of fibres showing unbroken and delicate and fine.

"It's nothing," she said, still looking at him, then down at the skeleton leaf in her hand, "every part of it is nothing now."

For a moment he did not speak. Her skin showed yellow in the sun; her hair was bleached and grey-white; there was something shuttered and blind about her eyes. What does she want? It's too late, his mind, even as he asked himself the question, said.

He looked down at her once more, uncomfortable for a moment and shamefaced. I've no feeling, none, he told himself. Almost pityingly, nevertheless, he touched her hand. "Go in, won't you?" he said. "It's cold still."

He walked on then. And Bridget, laying her trowel neatly beside the path, turned, and, something childlike about her now, went slowly in.

As she did so Brock was reminded once more with what bitterness he had spoken of her only a year ago. But he was past that, he was free of all that now, it seemed to him. I am released from fear of myself, his mind went, of everything outside myself. And because I have cast loose from what is past, envy doesn't touch me any longer, not even envy of Tamlin. And of all the nameless fears I once had there remains only the fear that I know. I am on familiar terms, as Tamlin said I should be, with my own fear. For me, for many thousands like me there's no escape from the burden of the moment, from what, after all, is history. But in that no escape we find, at least I find it to-day, release, a clear way, as it were, into a boundless space.

He stooped and unhooked a briar from his sleeve. With more time there might have been a poet in me. Even now, if I could I would sing of white blossoms against grey skies, and the green fans of the leaves putting out from the bare boughs and the toss of birds' wings. Softly at first, then more loudly, he began to sing, very tunelessly, to himself.

He came on Barbara Nancy waiting for him in the small wood between the trees.

"I sing like John Crow," he said. "I must sing. But then I am in love, you know that."

"I heard you." She laughed at him.

"I'm happy," he said. "I don't know why." He sat down beside her. "And you?"

"No." Half-ruefully she put out a hand.

He held her hand in his for a moment. "And you don't want to be loved even?" He touched her fingers one by one.

"I don't know, I can't be certain yet," she answered him after a moment.

He waited. Then, "Is Rosa at home still?" he asked. "Does she still scorn her husband?"

"Rosa's tough. But she doesn't scorn him." Barbara Nancy took away her hand.

"I wonder when I shall be tough." Brock sighed cheerfully, then sought in his pocket and produced, to Barbara Nancy's surprise, a green rubber crocodile adorned with black spots. "For Rosa's baby." He dangled the crocodile. "The child is a boy, isn't it? They did tell me, but probably I wasn't listening." He stowed the crocodile carefully away once more. "Perhaps I shall be allowed to see Rosa." He grinned. "She'll be surprised to see me in this disguise. She may even behave respectfully towards me. How nice that would be!"

"She still thinks of you as small. She remembers you holding her hand." Barbara Nancy spoke absently.

"Tamlin has gone back, of course?" Brock said after a moment.

"Last summer." Barbara Nancy opened her hands, looked at them, shut them again.

Brock looked at her. "I'm here," he said.

"I know," she said, her head turned away.

"But he'll come back?" Brock said.

She spoke with an effort. "I don't hear from him, you know. The Fisherman has a postcard now and then."

"Queer. No, not so queer for Tamlin." Brock got to his feet. "Let's walk on. It's cold here."

As they moved off he said: "You know, I think I understand Tamlin. I saw something of him just once, before I went out. I discovered a number of surprising things. He isn't so unlike me as I had thought, though he is altogether more sensible, more ruthless with himself and with other people than I am, or could ever be. He said a number of things to me—I won't bother you with them now—that helped, that made a difference to me when I went out first. I shall always be grateful to him for that. Altogether he was astonishingly understanding and kind. At the time I was not at all grateful. I was even a bit rude to him because I was feeling shattered. I don't really mean that Tamlin is like me. I only mean that he has his own problems to solve, that he doesn't find them too easy, that it isn't, as I'd made certain it was at one time, all plain sailing with him either."

How strange that you should know this and how fair-minded you are, Barbara Nancy thought silently.

"Tamlin was always the sort, wasn't he," Brock said, "to break away from personal ties? Just as I have always been the sort to seek them, even to long for them. But I think I understand why a man like Tamlin wants to cut loose." He paused. "You see," he said slowly, "the war takes all a man has. You are swallowed up in it. There's such a vast impersonal pressure upon you all the time that you become a bit strange to yourself, like a diver walking on the floor of the sea." He paused again.

He was being very generous, Barbara Nancy thought, and very intuitive also, something she had once thought Brock Doddington could never be. She did not speak. To-day her thoughts, and words to express her thoughts, came to her only slowly and stumblingly.

"I don't do what I imagine Tamlin does," Brock said once more. "I don't lose myself in the whole business, for

that is what I think he does. I do my best to stay outside it. I don't get grim; I get a bit light-headed instead. I was a bit light-headed before I met you to-day. It is my way of meeting a crisis. I do my best to transform things out there into something else, something large and personal to myself. It is my struggle, I say. Something important will come out of it for me personally, for me, myself. Perhaps a new confidence, a new knowledge. And when the war, or what I try to tell myself about the war, becomes too much for me, I think of other things. These are permanent, these are what matter; war is the irrelevance, I say."

"Can you do so much with your thoughts? I could not," Barbara Nancy said.

"I can. I've given myself plenty of practice," Brock said. "And I have never minded seeing my own weaknesses and reporting on them to myself."

Barbara Nancy went on a little way without speaking. I wish I approved, I wish I felt this was the best way to think and behave. I don't, her mind went. Quite suddenly she said: "I think you are right, or partly right, about Tamlin." She went on: "Somehow all that you say of him makes very little difference to me. It doesn't connect with what I feel; it is all so cerebral, so"—she hesitated—"so academic. I thought I could be simple and patient and understanding about it all, because I wished to be simple and patient and understanding. But I can't. I am not unselfish enough, I suppose. There is myself, I think, there is all that I feel. I would have given Tamlin anything if I had known what he wanted. But I didn't know, I didn't understand. What was between us seems spoiled by so much misunderstanding; it seems almost ugly now."

"Nothing that is ugly is permanent. The mind can't hold it. Yours can't," Brock said. "If," he said again, rather slow, "it is ugly."

"That is what I can't be sure of. I can't be sure of anything at the moment," Barbara Nancy said.

"Really you want him to write to you, that is partly it," Brock said.

"It might be." Once more she was surprised.

"If this fails, there's always the next thing. There always is a next thing," Brock said.

"And after that?"

"Why, the next again."

"Somehow all that seems doubtful too," she said.

They were silent once more, walking side by side, but a little apart.

"If I said I loved you, would it help?" at last Brock said.

"I don't—I don't altogether—love you." Once more she spoke unwillingly. "I don't care for you in the way you care for me. And I can't forget Tamlin. I can't behave as if he had never been there."

"We need not talk about it now. If you'll remember," Brock said.

"I'll remember," she said.

"A great many people marry and live together all their lives on much less, I feel," Brock said.

"I never feel like lots of people," Barbara Nancy answered.

"I do. I sometimes feel like any pebble on the beach."

"What nonsense! You can't." Touched by a sudden tenderness she looked at him. He was slight still, filled with an odd careless diffidence still; nothing would ever make a soldier of him in appearance, she thought.

"Haven't you noticed," he said, "there's a certain kind of obstinacy in me?"

"No," she answered. Once more she was surprised.

"You don't notice anything about me perhaps?"

"I do. Indeed I do." She was quiet for a moment. "I was going to say that I've known you for so long I've no need to notice. I was going to say you were like the way home. But that is too familiar, too rude. I haven't said it." Almost she laughed at him.

"We'll have to leave it," at last Brock said.

She spoke under her breath. "I hate leaving things."

"That is what you felt with Tamlin. You wanted to be certain. You see, I know everything about you beforehand," Brock said. He swung a hand. "For a man being certain hasn't quite the same importance, I feel."

They went on a little way in silence. Presently Brock spoke again. "I've been telling myself, every twenty or fifty or a hundred years the lunatic thing happens: some nation turns boa constrictor and tries to swallow the rest —Spain how many times, France how many times, and now Germany. It's a poison that makes its way through a nation, that when it goes leaves something like a corpse. This time our generation and all our private lives are caught up in it. And yet, even while I tell myself all this, the whole thing does not seem half so real as the river, and the wood here, and you."

"But it is real. It's more real than daylight," Barbara Nancy said.

They halted at the edge of the wood; then, since neither of them was ready to part, they turned and came back.

"I've a queer feeling sometimes when I come on leave," Brock said, "as if I were here such a short time and yet for ever. Lots of fellows have it, I gather. Part of it is the sort of feeling you have when you go to a place for a holiday; the rest is the sort of feeling you have just now and then when you're small, a safe for ever and ever sort of feeling. Even I had it sometimes."

They halted. The tall shapes of the trees stood before them again; here once more were the light patches of snow fast melting on the dark earth, and the March buds, jewelled and glistening in the cold air, lifting on the faintly-moving boughs.

"I shall miss it," Brock said. He looked about him like someone saying goodbye. "There are silver-washed fritillaries when the blackberry blossom is out in that copse.

And white admirals. A white admiral makes all the gorgeous-coloured butterflies appear vulgar beside it." He turned to her. "You know I loathe this business of saying goodbye."

"But we have never said goodbye." She spoke bravely. "And you will come back."

"Of course." He looked relieved suddenly. "We'll hope so," he said. He went on: "There were rumours over there when I left of a new German push this month or next. If it comes and is stopped—it will be stopped—it may very well be the Germans' last shot. Then the war might end. The war might end quite suddenly, I think sometimes. But it's a kind of snare one falls into—this wondering constantly how the war will end."

They were within sight of the windows of the house once more; the quick green of the tamarisk trees in the garden could be seen and the grey smoke curling up from the squat chimneys.

Brock halted once more. He turned to her then. "Barbara Nancy," he said, his eyes quiet and smiling, his voice tense.

Barbara Nancy's heart jumped, then appeared to stand still. It's finished, everything will be finished between us now, she thought. "I can't," she said. "Honestly, I can't."

Brock heard the despair in her voice. "It can wait. I shan't change," he said. He stooped to her. "Goodbye." He kissed her gravely then. As if this were not enough, his hands, long and nervous and fine, caught and held her hands.

"Goodbye. Come back. Be sure to come back," she said. And then, moved by something that was not pity, that was not quite love: "I'll be here. I'll always be here," she said.

There was a promise she had not intended—almost at once she realized it—in her words.

With a small gesture that did not seem flamboyant or foolish either then or afterwards, a movement of a hand

towards his heart, walking very swiftly, the crocodile's tail, she saw, hanging out of his pocket, he went away. She stood still, helplessly, as though he were already beyond her reach, and watched him go between the tall trunks of the trees, over the falling shafts of sun, out of sight.

CHAPTER THREE

THE VIGIL

TO-DAY, the ninth of April, and the Sergeant-major's birthday, was as misty as yesterday and promised to be as fine. In the silence of the dawn the birds were singing from every surviving bush, from every blackened tree. The mists at least held some of the blueness of spring; a lime tree, blasted half-way, was yet in tiny leaf, and a distant clump of birch trees showed frail and Corot-like against the sky.

"All those birch trees need, Parry, are nymphs to dance round them." Brock turned.

"Begging your pardon, I didn't quite hear, sir," Sergeant-major Parry said.

Brock repeated his remark.

"A bit flat-looking I always thought 'em. I never cared much for them things myself," the Sergeant-major replied.

"Well, it's quiet. Looks as if you'd have a fine birthday," Brock said.

"I don't think so much to their quiet," the Sergeant-major said.

"If they try anything against this sector, you and I won't have long to wait before we're in," Brock reminded him. Counter-attack platoon number one, that's us, he told himself, his mind repeating part of the lesson it had learned.

"If the Pork and Beans catch it first, that'll be a mess, fair fed-up they are," Parry said.

"There might be a mess anywhere for a bit with any one of us," Brock said.

He went over everything conscientiously once more in his mind. It was the General's—Major-General Jeudwine's—maxim that any attack pressed with vigour was likely to achieve a success. But the success must be halted. That, in the General's plan, was where Counter-Attack Units as opposed to Garrison Units came in. Everyone in the Fifty-fifth Division knew what was expected of him and how and when to act. No counter-attacks, got together at the last moment and thrown hopelessly at the enemy, for them. No indecision or unpreparedness where the Fifty-fifth was concerned. Instead, a brain and a will at work, and everything possible foreseen and prepared for. Enfilading fire, for example, designed to lead the enemy towards machine-gun nests. If part of the line gave way a local counter-attack to be made at once and the line restored. One main instruction only to be borne in mind by every man: that the Line of Resistance—and everyone knew where that lay—be held at all costs.

It was as well to know, Brock thought grimly. He laughed then.

"I don't fancy Windy Corner much myself, Parry," he said.

"Proper name for that bastard place," Sergeant-major Parry said. He chewed on an unlighted cigarette. "Though I reckon Lover's Lane is just as warm. Lovers' Lane between Gourock Road and R.E. Dump, I mean. The Forty-seventh Canadians had it after us. That's where I was last when I caught my packet. Lovers' Lane, I said to myself, sweating there, waiting to be picked up, if ever there's a spot too hot to be in, the army's bound sure to call it Lovers' Lane."

"In a gas mask you'd be lucky to see a thing at forty

yards in this mist," Brock remarked, standing on the fire-step and looking through his glasses.

Quiet or not, that's a cock-eyed way to act, to look like that over the top of the trench, the Sergeant-major thought. Quite impartially he said: "How many do we reckon there'd be against us if they started another little do like they did on the twenty-first, sir?"

"I'm not in the know," Brock said, "but seven or eight divisions perhaps and about five or six in reserve. They would be in great strength, intelligence reports. They've got all that to put against us, but not, we think, much more. It sounds a lot, but it's not quite enough. Not quite. When you've an equal enemy against you, equal in determination and weapons, you need a hell of a superiority in numbers to put him down." He yawned uncontrollably, then looked at his watch. "What do you make it, Parry? Four-fifteen? Four-ten? No watch keeps time on me. Four-fifteen, did you say?"

"I could do with a nice bit of shut-eye in a feather bed with sheets: that's what I'd like," Sergeant-major Parry said. You're too quicksilver-like, that's why watches don't keep time on you, to himself he said, and he looked kindly but critically also at Brock, and taking his own Ingersoll from his pocket he wound it, then dropped it on its silver chain into his pocket once more.

It was at that moment, 4.15 a.m., that the German bombardment, which was to usher in the Battle of the Lys, began. This, as everyone who heard and felt the bombardment at once recognized, could be no other than the opening second stage of that German offensive launched on the twenty-first of March and checked in front of Amiens only five days since. No one could be in doubt that, in the plans of the German High Command at least, the British Army was once more to be destroyed, and Britain, "the arch-enemy of the Central Powers"—so the wording of Field-Marshal Ludendorff's previous Order of the Day had gone

—overcome. Scarcely a man of all the waiting thousands in General Sir Robert Horne's First Army but knew both the hazards and the cost. There are moments in history that call out all there is of ancestry in every man, when in no ghostly sense a man's forefathers fight with him. And this was one of these. Though the Battle of Hastings lasted only from dawn to sunset of one day, and Waterloo was fought out in two afternoons, the Battle of the Lys was to rage without ceasing for twenty-one days and nights. And as yet no one knew how long it would last, or what course it would take.

For a moment at least thought and feeling in every man were as crowding and thick as the mists behind which, silent as they were, waiting as they were, the enemy lay. While the bombardment lasted everyone felt himself cut off from his neighbour, and isolated, and all but overwhelmed. As the hours wore on endurance became a slow agony. The day grew lighter. The greyness was touched with blue. The sun was a vast orange disc thrust slowly up on golden stilts of light. But the mists hugged the ground and, as if they were in league with evil, obstinately hid the sky. Not the threat, nor the horror, but sound itself beat endlessly upon the brain. And still the guns raged, the air itself, thunder and lightning mixed, seemed to rend and crack; even while he remained standing a man could feel himself dragged with the vibrations of sound along the ground.

For four hours the bombardment continued. Then, with a heavy burst of mortar fire, it ceased. Silence was glassy now, was splintered, and full of wounds. In the hush of exhaustion that followed, silence at first was hard to bear. Then, out of the scarcely endurable moment, out of the creeping barrage that was part of the mists, the assault came: the grey uniforms, the blur of faces, the steel helmets, rank upon rank of men marching shoulder to shoulder, invisible in the mists until less than forty yards away.

"Hold your fire until you see their helmets," the order

ran. It used to be, "Hold your fire until you see the whites of their eyes." But that was in Marlborough's time, at Blenheim and Malplaquet and Ramillies, just about two hundred years or more ago. So Brock Doddington's mind went as he waited.

"Miles and miles o' Germans," Corporal Biggs, who lived in the Walworth Road and who knew no history, said.

Like a ploughed field coming up at you, Brock Doddington thought, and every clod a man.

Nearly ten o'clock, and just over five minutes to go. It was their turn now, the turn of all counter-attack units of the Fifty-fifth, the turn, among others, of counter-attack platoon number one. Already, so great had been the impetus of the assault, the enemy were in the ruins of Givenchy Church, and had reached the Guinchy Road. Counter-attack platoon number one was for Windy Corner. Five minutes. No one stirred very much. Yet the restlessness in each man's mind could be sensed, the craving for something different from waiting, for action perhaps, for some sort of relief. It was forbidden to smoke; no one wanted to talk. Brock looked at his watch. Less than five minutes now. His hand trembled, the pulse fluttered in his wrist.

"I'm a fool. I can't keep my hand steady, Parry," he said quietly.

"It's my knees that knock. I'd like a cushion between 'em," the Sergeant-major said, not trembling at all.

If I could be as steady as Parry, Brock thought. Ridiculously he thought again: But I'm a different kind of fly. What am I made of? Blood, bone, nerves. Nerves overmastering now. And the soul? Every different man has a different, separate soul. Thought followed a crazy pattern, thought, uncontrollable for a moment, led nowhere now.

He stirred. Pace slackened, thought cleared again. It was the waiting, one's mind ticking over like a cab-meter,

that was hard to bear. Windy Corner, the Line of Resistance, what symbolical names these were for him, perhaps for everyone! And yet they existed: in that sense they were real names; they would find their way eventually into the pages of history books.

He touched his revolver. He looked at his watch again. Three more minutes. Time running out, running fast now. He glanced at the men who were nearest him. They were feeling much as he was feeling, he did not doubt, thinking in much the same muddled sort of way, looking ahead as he was into those mists that for all that remained of the foulness of phosgene and mustard gas were yet blue with spring, into a world grown wide with evil now. There was Parry, looking sardonic as Parry always did just before the time. And Private Rainger grinning that satirical grin of his. Rainger had filled him with confusion before this: Rainger had that power over him. But not to-day. "Not long now," he said, like a fool of course. At once, for he was not brave enough yet to meet Rainger's ironical and unspoken response, he looked away.

He had been through this before, as Parry had, and Rainger, and Corporal Biggs, and half the men with him. It should be almost a routine matter now; almost that, just going on, and duty. No fuss, no counter-fuss either. Though thought was private, one could think as one pleased. Other people depending upon one: that was the steadying thing; that was to be remembered. But it took all you had to remember. At least, he corrected himself, it took all he had. But I know what to expect, his mind went, I know myself. Only this time it is different, this time it's a bigger, a more testing affair. From this point his mind sought refuge in quite meaningless repetitions, in not quite meaningless words. Time; it's time now. And his own name, Brock Doddington, Brock Doddington—and once, Johnny Brock. Comfortable words came next, resting the mind. Words you had taken to yourself long ago when the

abyss was a different abyss, of the imagination only, with always a steep way up the other side. He remembered them. "It is but a little vigil that your lives have still to keep. You were not made to live like brutes, but to follow courage and wisdom like a sinking star." He moved. Even now, he thought, even now I must quote Dante.

Fifty seconds to go. Now agony, sharper than he had known, more searching than he had dreamed, struck at him out of the dark corners of his mind. The soul dies many deaths. This is what it is to die. Now agony has my soul, he thought. Now my body. Now I am dragged down. Now the moving waters close over me. Oh help me now!

His mind steadied then. The mists that had thickened before his eyes, hiding his hands from him, and the face of the watch on his wrist, and the lip of the trench, lifted. But still his heart laboured; his mind thrust back, groping for what he loved and knew. Courage lies there, he thought, only there. He looked before him and saw, not earth grown small and vile, but the wood again, the branches moved by faint airs, and the flight of crystal drops like petals from the boughs, and the bright enamelled wings of the birds. He could see the blue shadows in the snow, the red reflections in the streams. "In July the dark wings of butterflies, the silver-washed fritillaries; in April the primroses, the white anemones." One-tenth a poet, he thought in a watchful aside, and bad at that; the rest not quite a coward.

Thought ceased then. He let his hand drop to his side.

"Come on, lads, it's time now," he said. He was glad to know his own voice and hear it sound so quiet. At once he was conscious of release, of a sudden longing to be free, to finish what was before him.

After that there was confusion, and in between confusion moments of action that were piercingly sharp and clear, and yet so small they seemed meaningless in the vastness of the battle. The end of the day brought an awareness of the body shutting out every other sense, an awareness made up

of hunger, and shaking fatigue, and a blackness before his eyes. And through it he longed above everything else to sleep.

Last of all, in a moment of quiet, came the surprising thing that always seemed to wait for him on the other side of safety: a crying scarcely heard at first, then sudden and sharp on the ear, coming from over there where everything was uncertain and in confusion still. Someone left behind and crying only half-consciously, he had thought. And once more he was back in Alne, the bees tossing over the bean flowers and the larks singing (a lark sang even now somewhere, a winding stair of sound), and again the same crying came to him over the fields, high and thin as now, from some creature, some hare or rabbit perhaps, caught in a snare.

He looked down at his hands. Sleep, his mind said remorselessly, sleep.

"Rainger," someone said. "Private Rainger, sir."

Don't tell me, he thought. I know. Private Rainger wounded, and caught on the wire.

"He was just behind me," Parry said.

He looked at them uncomprehendingly. Desperately he resisted what was in his mind. It would go on, the crying, he thought then, beyond bearing it would go on. And he remembered how that other crying had filled all the fields with pain.

They waited, not looking at him, not looking at each other either. No one spoke.

Because they waited, and because the crying and the waiting were the hardest things to bear, he spoke then. "I'll go," he said, "while it's still quiet. Who'll come with me?"

There had been volunteers enough. He had chosen Corporal Biggs. Together they had crawled out into the dusk, that was no dusk at all but coloured yellow and grey like the dawn, and, like the dawn, once more full of menace and sound. He remembered Biggs being hit and himself

going on alone, having ordered Biggs back. He remembered finding Rainger and feeling suddenly light-headed, or perhaps it was only light-hearted, from relief, and himself being hit. He had felt nothing at first, only a gasping for breath, and then a sticky wetness spreading over his tunic, spilling over on to his hands. He had not thought of giving up. For Rainger was his, he had told himself, light-headed in earnest now; he'd not leave him, he would have no more crying. He had gone on with Rainger until he could go no more. They had found him then, whether a long time or a short time afterwards he did not know. Sergeant-major Parry had looked down at him. He remembered the dirt and the sweat-marks on Parry's face, and the large ears, and the kind, vexed look in Parry's rather prominent blue eyes. "We heard you," Parry said. "Lord, did I shout too?" he had said. He had moved his head. "Rainger here?"—"Rainger's dead, sir," Parry had said. He could have wept then, not for Rainger, not for himself, but for the waste and folly of it all.

But the Fifty-fifth had held, they told him. And Windy Corner, except for a house or two, was theirs once more, and the Division's Line of Resistance everywhere was restored. He had been glad of that, and sleepily content. Like someone wakeful for a long time, quite suddenly, it seemed to him now, he had slept.

In one day he had moved from one confusion to another, from fear through pain to sleep. The pain remained, every fresh breath a pain. With the prick of a needle in his arm he floated over pain now, as though invisibly between air and sea. In what appeared to be the next moment he opened his eyes. But the lights that swung faintly from the ornate plaster ceiling burned now through a blue shade, and everything, even the hem of the turned-down sheet on his bed, showed too tidy or too still. He could see himself, motionless and small, wrapped up like a child in a cot bed. Around him were other men in similar cot beds; and they too were

It was quiet in the room. His head bowed, even his body bowed, her father waited while the clock ticked in the odd measured fashion common to family clocks during long pauses, long silences, as if the clock were time and time could feel, as if time were judge of yesterday and to-day and to-morrow, of this moment, of every moment to come. A honey-bee lost in the room buzzed about the flowers, white lilac and tulips mixed, in the pewter bowl. The tulips were splashed crimson and yellow and red; their long stems curved outwards like the slender wings of birds; they were like swallows held suspended for ever in low skimming flight. No scent came from the tulips, but the scent of the lilac, French-white, French-fine, was spread abroad in the small room. And while she waited Barbara Nancy marvelled again, though differently, that there should be so little talk between her father and mother over this, that they should know each other's minds, should trust each other so well. It was not the living together, she thought, nor the growing together that made their minds so simply at one. Surely it was that under all their outward differences they were the same sort of person, surely it was that in spirit and mind they had always been one.

Her father had handed the Fisherman's letter back to her mother. "That is for you to decide," finally, between long pauses, he had said.

Her mother had read the letter and folded it, and laid it, as if it were a letter already answered, on one side. "I'll write at once," she had said. Her voice had been clear, her look full and clear as she spoke; there had been decision and trembling also in her face and hands.

"What is it?" Barbara Nancy had asked. Normally she would have waited; but not to-day. To-day was no time for waiting. "You can read for yourself," her father had said.

She had guessed the truth almost at once. She had no need to read. For the Fisherman, who, since his wound had

been slow to heal, had been on garrison duty only, had asked permission to volunteer again. "They want every man," he had written. "Honestly, because of the others, I'd prefer to go."

Margaret's pen squeaked and spluttered over the last line of the page. In a forward flowing hand that was somehow characteristic of her, she signed her name. As swiftly as she had written she set down her pen.

"I have told him," she said, her voice firm and clear again, "to do what he thinks is right. 'Go and God be with you,' I have said."

Edward Furness nodded twice but he did not speak. Barbara Nancy bent her head. How if you have no one left, no one? she thought. How if Henry is killed too? For Plompartay, somewhere in the midst of it all, was out there also. Suddenly the words on the printed page swam up and ran together once more before her eyes. "A woman is more laughing and loving than is a man," the words, quite irrelevant words, said.

Everything at times seems to point to her. She is what all books are made of, Barbara Nancy thought. It was of her mother she thought.

The letter sealed and posted, from all the passion of feeling she had not yet spent, Margaret wept silently then. No one comforted her; no one spoke; no one had words, or comfort, to give. Slowly Edward Furness filled his pipe; Margaret bent over her darning again. Once more it was quiet in the room except for the measured ticking of the clock on the wall and the buzz of the bee about the flowers. Nothing was different and yet, once more, it was as though everything had changed.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOW EXPRESSIONLESS IS THE SEA

It was cool in the ward, no longer April, no longer May. Outside an August sun shone out of a grey sky on the wet earth. A breeze, bringing with it the smell of the sea, blew from the open windows upon the white beds, stirring the white covers, ruffling the blue lupins and the prize delphiniums from the local flower show in their white-glazed pots; the striped blinds cast dusky shadows on the red polished floor. The men in the rows of beds lay still as if they were asleep, as if, like flowers cut off from harm, they bloomed, a pale lustre about them, under glass.

"I had to send for you," Brock said. "I get so sick of myself." He smiled at her. "Now that you've come there'll be such waggings of tongues in Alne over you and me."

"No one will know," Barbara Nancy said, a pang of pity at her heart that had nothing to do with her words.

"I should be honoured for them to know." Brock stirred, not much more than a movement of one hand and arm. "Ellen came." He spoke distastefully. "She peered about the ward as if she were under my bed and afraid to come out. Looking for death and wounds, perhaps," he said. He waited a moment. "I don't know why I should still be spiteful about her. There is nothing very much wrong with her perhaps, except that she is so insensitive." He waited again and then said, half-smiling as he spoke, "I expect she cried in the train going home just for the pleasure of being comforted."

"She cried to me," Barbara Nancy said, nodding.

"Why? I am quite all right, quite," Brock said. "It is this temperature of mine that won't go down. I've a piece of shell lodging very awkwardly in my lung, they say, that

will have to come out. But we don't have to talk about me, don't let's do it," he said.

"You come first to-day," Barbara Nancy said.

'Only to-day?" Brock said. Almost at once he went on: "Since you must know, it appears I've distinguished myself. I know better, of course. Though I am flattered just the same. I am due to be decorated, they tell me. It doesn't mean much, really. They give a lot of these things away." He laughed. "That is true, quite true. But it's queer, isn't it, that I should be telling you this? I, Brock Doddington. Not Tamlin, or your John, or Henry, or almost anyone else whom we know? It is queerest of all for me to be lying here. It gets more queer. Such a bodiless life, yet you think of your body all the time. But your body is far-off, it's flown. Nothing belonging to you connects any longer with your thoughts. Nothing ever happens; nothing, you feel, ever will happen to you again. There are only your thoughts, you see, floating out into a void like weeds in the flow of a stream. Even your thoughts are anchored; even they don't move. All this is intensely wearying. No patience is wide enough to bear it. You need a patience as wide and bottomless as the sea. In the end you long for anything that is different. Not the highlights—the highlights are dazzling when you are tired. Only plain honest-to-God dullness is satisfying in the long run, you find. That is the real thing; that is what you long for. Then you know you are alive, that you will go on being alive, doing something, being something, however small." He leaned a little towards the other side and looked at her. As if the slight change of position pained him, he relaxed once more. "I've got to get out of here. I must," almost angrily he said, and Barbara Nancy flushed then from a strange mingling of understanding and alarm.

"Tell me about the Fisherman. Tell me about something that isn't this place, that isn't me, anyway," Brock said in a different, a more reassuring voice.

"John sounds almost happy." She sought in her mind swiftly. "He writes, 'At last we have got them on the run'."

"Since the push against the Hindenburg Line," Brock said. He was silent for a moment and apparently content. "I'd have felt better if I had been knocked out then. That would have been something to write home about," he said.

"There were only thirteen left in the Fisherman's company when they were through." Barbara Nancy spoke simply.

Brock nodded slowly twice. "The war will be over some time, perhaps soon," he said. As if to himself he added: "And then there'll be dancing in the village streets."

He moved quickly, then checked himself once more. "If I were in better trim, I'd ask you finally, 'Have you made up your mind?'"

She spoke quickly. "Not since I told you. Not differently."

"Though I am not sure it is so urgent yet," he went on. "I mean you are here and I am here. You won't do anything sudden. You won't go away. Or will you?" He grinned then. And Barbara Nancy remembered all at once that he had sounded just as content on this same point before. And because she was not sure of herself, and because she was a little afraid of the affection she had always felt for Brock Doddington and the mingled pity and love that she felt for him now, she wished passionately for a moment that she might stay of the same mind. It is not only that I love Tamlin, that I love him differently; it is that I wish to love him, she thought.

"There's a little nurse who sits with me a great deal," Brock said. "We talk now and then, though generally we are very quiet together. We have nothing in common—we are like so many engaged couples in that—except a constant, complete, companionable silence. You know," looking at Barbara Nancy, he said.

"Yes."

"Every bit as nice as talking," he said. "She's dark—white

skin, grey eyes, gold flecks in them." The rest's unfinished. When you feel the night closing down on you, she comes then. Like the stars, I tell her. Her name is Stella, oddly enough. I think I like her next best to you," he added mischievously.

"Do you?" Barbara Nancy sounded surprised. "Should you talk so much?" she asked anxiously.

"Ask her." As if he knew the answer Brock nodded to where the ward sister sat at her small table in the dead centre of the room, the blue dome of the ward above her head. "Like God in His blue heaven," Brock said.

"Mr. Doddington? I don't think it will make any difference to-day," the sister said.

Barbara Nancy returned.

"I told you. This is my official birthday." Brock spoke with a sudden burst of energy after that. "If I felt certain I'd get out eventually, I wouldn't mind it here. Though I don't think of getting out more than I can help. Everything at present for me seems so much over the hills and far away." He smiled at her. "But you do get there, in time, over the hills, I mean. And far away."

"Did you know," he said a moment afterwards, "that that was a refrain from a song current among the soldiery at the time of Blenheim? They weren't such blaspheming men of blood even then. And for the people at home in any war anywhere we must always seem over the hills, I think, and far away."

The surgeon and the houseman came round. The surgeon nodded at Brock, looked keenly at Barbara Nancy, and passed on.

"He saw me yesterday," Brock explained.

They talked of everything after that, except of what Barbara Nancy wished to hear.

Out of one of their silences, however, Brock asked surprisingly: "And Tamlin?"

"Tamlin sends me messages now, quite frequent mes-

sages," Barbara Nancy said. "Through the Fisherman. John still hears from him. I have a postcard myself now and then too." She spoke carefully. "We haven't seen him," she said.

"What do you send him?" Brock inquired curiously.

"I send him postcards and messages too."

"Tell him I'm here, will you?" Brock said. "No, don't. It is terribly schoolboyish of me to want him to know. He would guess that, of course; he would recognize the schoolboyishness."

"I'll tell him just plainly about you in my next postcard," she said.

"And you don't write to him." Brock meditated. "Though you want to—of course you want to. You will make a formidable woman one day, Barbara Nancy." He smiled at her. "I expect Tamlin thinks so. Perhaps, secretly, Tamlin is alarmed."

Barbara Nancy changed colour then. "He may think as he pleases. And feel as he pleases."

"Go on waving your banner of independence," Brock said.

"I wave it for myself. I do everything of that kind for myself."

"Of course. Though you might want him to see how independent you are and become alarmed."

"Tamlin wouldn't be alarmed," Barbara Nancy said.

They were quiet once more. A nurse brought tea and honey and toast. Someone outside, a long pole in his hand, moved from one window to the next. As he did so the striped blinds flew up, one by one, and clicked into place. The sun, a dazzle of white now in a grey sky, flooded in, yet there were shadows still on the polished floor, shadows of flowers, shadows of beds, and long anonymous shadows like shapes across the floor. In the distance was the sea, immense, glittering in a myriad dancing points of light.

Here England ends, Barbara Nancy thought. And, almost in the same moment, incongruously, how expression-

less is the sea. She spoke her thought aloud. "I don't know what I mean by that quite," she said.

"It's like the beginning and the end of things, it won't change for us," Brock said.

A different nurse came into the ward; she looked at Barbara Nancy quickly, shut a window, and went away.

"That is the nurse I spoke of. That is Nurse May," Brock said.

A moment or two later Barbara Nancy looked at her watch. "I must go," she said. I'll be glad to go, her mind went. She spoke guiltily in the next breath. "I'll come again."

"Don't go yet," Brock said. "I haven't yet told you what I set out to tell you."

Once more she sat down.

He looked at her then and spoke steadily. "You know, this business of my being decorated is nonsense really. I'd like you quite honestly to believe that. My decision wasn't in the least bit admirable, and what I did was a stupid sort of thing to do anyhow. A good soldier doesn't run unnecessary risks. That was one of the things Tamlin taught me. I believed I had taken the warning to heart, but I forgot that time. And the poor chap I fetched in was done for, though I didn't know that either. So I didn't help him, I didn't save his life. Only the crying he made unnerved me badly. I was in a queer enough state already, after the attack and at the end of the day, a state more like sleep-walking than anything else. Nightmarish, topsy-turvy like a bad dream, with ridiculous moments and sane moments mixed. And for a moment there was just nothing to do, almost nothing to take up my mind, only the thought that the crying must stop, that I couldn't bear it any longer. Before I had time to think again I had made my decision, if you can call it a decision. Really I was thrust on by an infinitely bullying voice in my own mind, a hurdy-gurdy voice that kept on saying 'Go on, go on, do something.'

"Once I had begun there was no turning back. I was compelled to go on, deeper and still deeper. It felt like that when I remember feeling anything at all. At one time in my early days out there I used to tell myself monotonously, in the way one does when one is not very happy or when one is being nagged at constantly by the same set of thoughts, 'There's no escape, none.' This time I said: 'There's no turning back, none,' all the way until I was where Rainger was." He stopped short now as if he had forgotten what he wished to say.

"Tell me about the man you brought in." Once more Barbara Nancy spoke quickly.

"I was coming to that," he said, smiling.

She looked at him anxiously. He appeared younger, he looked like Brock Doddington again for a moment when he smiled. But his skin was too dead a white still, and the fever-sweats had made dark hollows about his cheeks.

"He was a fellow in my platoon called Rainger, Bob Rainger. He was not educated; he was not clever, though he always reminded me of Tamlin. When I brought him back I thought for a moment or two that I was bringing Tamlin in; at one crazy moment I even felt I was doing for Tamlin what Tamlin had done for me years ago. You remember? It was a queer sort of association of ideas, a queer repetition once more." He paused for a second, then went on again. "Rainger was a wonderfully good fellow in a great many ways: steady, always himself, ironical, dry. But I think he hated any sort of discipline that was not his own. If he had only realized it, he wasn't alone in that. He obeyed orders, you see, but always with something held back. There was always some element of disbelief, something mocking, I used to feel, in the way he looked at me. Nothing on which I could ever lay a finger. But you can't think how rattled I used to be by it all. He had sized me up; he knew all about me, I felt. He communicated his disbelief, if not to the other men, at least to me. He seemed

to know when I was the least bit rattled. It pleased him, I think, in a queer way, that I should be fussed while he kept cool. It fed the unconscious arrogance in him, just as it might have fed mine, I suppose, if our positions had been reversed. He not only looked a little like Tamlin, I reacted to him in something of the same way. You know I have even hated him in the same way once or twice, and liked and admired him also in the same way. Rainger had a similar, not unkindly contempt for me. He knew that I was the demonstrative kind; he knew that I dramatized everything—myself and every situation out there in which I found myself. I saw things in so heightened a perspective, I realize now, that I wasn't seeing them at all, but only my own heightened vision of them. I tried not to show all that latent hysteria in myself. The other men who saw, or wished to see, less of the truth, or who were more kindly, merely said—mind, I am only interpreting now—that I was a bit nervy, or that I lived on my nerves. Rainger knew better. Actor, mock hero, Rainger would have said, or something of the same sort of thing in his own line of talk. If he had said anything, that is. For just as he disliked taking orders, so he disliked, or rather distrusted, words. I feel he was on the right side there. Words come too easily to me. I have too many words. You and I have always agreed on that. I run on like a brook sometimes. I can hear myself running on like a brook now."

"Why must you anatomize yourself?" Barbara Nancy said.

"It amuses me. I find it helpful," Brock said, and looked surprised. "But to go on with Rainger. 'Are you all right?' I asked him. We had come on a long way by that time. 'I'm fine,' he told me. He tried to grin at me, friendly this time, but a bit ironical as well. Just before they found us, 'Put me down, boss, I'm finished,' he said. There was no irony in his voice then. I didn't believe it, of course. Not in the sense in which it was meant. It was only afterwards that I remembered what he had said. Boss, he called me,"

Brock said. "I wish I knew why. Perhaps it was no more than habit, a civilian habit that came back. He had been a navvy on Merseyside before the war, you see. I put him down. By that time I was almost finished myself. And at that moment nothing that happened to Rainger or to me seemed important any longer. 'I'll be seeing you, either way,' I told myself. I was a bit crazed in that moment, a bit crazed now and then all the time I was bringing Rainger in. I was light-headed also, perhaps from loss of blood—I don't know. So, you see, I'm a hero." With one finger Brock traced a waving line on the smooth turned-down hem of the sheet. "The whole thing was a gesture on my part. One more gesture directed not towards Rainger but towards myself." He looked up. "But, you know, there is this—having found him I could not have given him up. I felt he was mine. If it wouldn't appear ridiculous, I would say I felt almost maternal towards him. Though I have never," Brock laughed, "felt even remotely maternal towards anybody before."

"The authorities know what you did," Barbara Nancy said. "Why not allow them to know?"

"They can't know. I am the only person that knows." Brock bent his head suddenly as if he were tired.

Barbara Nancy began to gather her hat and handbag and gloves together.

He spoke again. "I was thinking that we have all of us only so much courage, and we must spend it; so much time, and we must spend that. I was thinking, too, or rather I was telling myself, though perhaps it isn't sense—Time, I told myself, a bridge over eternity; courage, a gold plating over fear. Metaphors are pictures, of course, that is why one likes them." He spoke diffidently again.

Barbara Nancy held her hands still in her lap. Not for the first time that afternoon she was deeply troubled and afraid for Brock Doddington. Once more, not so steadily, she took up her hat and gloves.

"Why, when a man is sick, does he always want to go home?" Brock said. "I suppose out of a longing for the kind of safety he knew when he was a child. Not that I ever felt so safe. But I loved the Well meadow and the sun on it, and the blue flowers—cranesbill, weren't they?—that came up every year by the river bank, and oh, dozens of things." He looked at her. "Did I ever tell you that your eyes were coloured just like those blue flowers? They are still." He looked away. "The water in the river was so dark, so soft when you felt it, and when the sun shone so full of the darkest gold. And when the fish moved in shoals upstream they were like hundreds of lighter, moving flecks of gold." He stirred a hand. "The country here is lovely, but there is nothing dark, nothing soft here. Only the cold bright sea colours, everything hard, clear, cold, like a mermaid's eyes."

He turned. In astonishment he said: "You are crying, Barbara Nancy. Why?"

"I don't know why." She sniffed valiantly. "Too much talk, I think." She began, very carefully, to wipe the corners of both eyes.

"You'll wash all the blue away," Brock said, watching her.

She laughed then.

"Really, there is nothing to cry about. I am getting well, really I am almost happy," he said.

"I don't believe any of it." Barbara Nancy stood up.

"It wouldn't be for me you were crying, would it?" he said.

"I wasn't crying. Not altogether crying." She pulled in a determined manner on the front of her hat-brim; she tucked her handbag under one arm.

"You might kiss me out of kindness," Brock said meekly, "or even from something else that is not kindness, before you go." He smiled still, but his eyes, that sought her eyes, stayed expressionless and dark.

Barbara Nancy stooped and kissed him then. "That is for something else," she said.

She went quickly between the lines of beds, down the long ward, under all the pairs of eyes bent with what weariness, with what indifference upon her, into the grey corridor, and again, suddenly and painfully, it seemed to her, out into the hard, unrelenting glare of the sun, into the light that broke in splintered daggers of glass on the whiteness of the stone steps, on the bending green of the grass, on the invalid-chairs and the bandaged men in them, and the blue sparkle of the infinite sea.

O world, O life, O time, she remembered, for she matched one fragment of verse with another, she confused things still. Behind the world, life, time, in what darkness, she asked, in what radiance, did eternity dwell? But before her eyes lay only the road, and a red bus travelling along it, and in the distance, like a railway-poster, the blue sparkle of the infinite sea.

CHAPTER FIVE

A FAR COUNTRY

NOT before they were expected, but miraculously none the less, like the first bee or the first snowdrop, they had appeared. Some had not taken the air since Mafeking night, many more were as though fresh from the dyer's vat and virgin to the breeze. Mrs. Tubbs floated the Royal Standard from the little window on the corner; Union Jacks, large and small, hung from every window, or were lashed valiantly to yellow crooked chimney-pots; young Mr. Chapman, the old miller's son, floated a vast Red Ensign over the millhouse, perhaps for the excellent reason that most of his corn came from oversea; in Sigbarrow a Welsh

dragon, robbed of some of its fire in the dank Midland airs, hung limply from the personal private office window of Mr. Jonas Llewellyn, manager of the Sigbarrow and Alne Co-operative Society. Through Alne itself the rabbit-catcher, pedalling slowly and heavily as if he were forever treading earth over rabbit burrows, went on his way to summon the bellringers, and Miss Scattergood, who had done most of the laundry in the neighbourhood for years, began to take in her long lines of washing. "There was enough blowing about already," she said, looking jealously around her at the flags, like so many ships of sail of many nations, taking the breeze.

A child waving a Union Jack ran from one of the small houses, and as she ran fell almost at Barbara Nancy's feet. Barbara Nancy picked her up and dusted her down. Almost exhausted by her effort after weeks of influenza, she went on once more. Before her eyes the red cross of Saint George broke smoothly up the white flagstaff on the church tower to ride pure white, pure red, against the cool blueness of the November sky. She looked behind her. From Sigbarrow Church, from Callow and Horton Churches, from all the church towers that were to be seen, the Cross of Saint George, held back until this moment of certainty, streamed. Rumour for once had spoken truly then; quite suddenly, after weeks of waiting and hoping, the moment at last was here: this was armistice; this, almost certainly, was peace and victory.

She felt herself strangely unmoved, as though the events of the last few weeks, victory following victory, had exhausted all her store of wonder, as though the very magnitude of the occasion had left a paralysis of feeling behind. Or is it only selfishness that speaks in me, she thought, that makes it difficult to rejoice, as if, turning my head away, I asked something which I would never consciously ask: Why should I be glad? The Philosopher dead, Brock Doddington dead, and Tamlin wounded or hurt, and Tamlin not here?

She had reached the far side of the small wood. The

stumps of the trees cut down a year ago were already green with moss; the remaining trees, no more than over-grown saplings, their thin tops half-stripped of leaves, swayed like tall flowers. Before her, screened by bushes and facing the main drive of the wood, was a rounded stump shaped roughly like a chair. She sat down upon it and waited for what she scarcely knew, for time to pass or strength to return. The wood, it seemed to her, as her mind moved back, held a part of her life in a web of filtered air and dark shining twigs and leaves.

Thought came simply now. She remembered how Brock Doddington had said, a shadow clouding his face: "Peace, and there'll be dancing in the village streets." And Tamlin would be back before long, he had said. His last letter, which was addressed to her father, had been full of famous names that were history now: St. Quentin, St. Mihiel, Bourlon Wood, Cambrai, the Forest of the Argonne. "We'll play leap-frog with them again; nothing can stop us now," he had said. There had been a message for her in the letter also: "Tell Barbara Nancy I'll see her before long: we'll finish things then." That was on September the twenty-fifth, before the great attack began. Since then St. Quentin had fallen and Bourlon Wood; the Americans had taken St. Mihiel and the Forest of the Argonne. Everywhere after that time the enemy were in full retreat. And Tamlin was wounded, a postcard in a strange hand dispatched from somewhere in France had said. Since then no further word had come from Tamlin.

Peace, the bells rang, from Alne Church in the hollow, from Sigbarrow Church half a mile away—peace, victory. Again her mind, as though the words were meaningless, repeated: peace, victory.

Of Brock Doddington she thought: I half-promised what I had no right to promise; afterwards I took back the half-promise I had made. Of Tamlin she thought: I sent him away empty, I gave him only stiffness and pride. What was

between Brock Doddington and myself was complete and finished, and yet it was not enough. It was kindness and affection I felt for him, and kindness and affection, however deep, since they are not love are not enough. The touch of Tamlin's hand on mine, that was different, that was enough. There was no magic between us, he said, making me angry. Simply to know that he was there was magic for me. I was more content with him; I was richer.

No one can say what love is, but I think it is something different from happiness or delight. I said once: I know nothing, one day I shall know everything. But the best part of knowledge comes only from oneself. I am not old, but now and then it is as though all the centuries were carved on the palm of my hand, all the generations that have made me. I feel curiously certain of myself now: nothing that can happen can hurt me for long, I feel; I can't be destroyed. Brock steeled himself; he made thought and words his banners and served under them. I am steeled, too, by some quality of knowledge that has grown as I have grown—what else to call it I do not know.

Nothing can steel me for long against Tamlin. There is a dead quietness in the centre of me that only lives when he is there. But whether I am anything to him, again I do not know. There's no more than a blank sheet in my mind written over in shadow ink: Tamlin is here, is there; Tamlin is hurt, is ill; or even—Tamlin, a little contemptuous always, is contemptuous for ever now.

Even if Tamlin came, she thought again, after a while he might say, moving his hands restlessly first, then hiding them in his pockets: "I am off to the Great Barrier Reef, or Travancore, or, say, the fair land of Twi, or Uzzum." And I should be obliged to answer, quite unconcerned: "Pleasant journey, Tamlin." If I were fortunate he might send me postcards: "All well. How are you? Tamlin"; or views of Travancore, or the Great Barrier Reef, or the pleasant land of Twi, and, scrawled in the corner, as though

forgotten, or perhaps not felt until that moment, another message: "Love, Tamlin." But that, coming from Tamlin, would be something extravagant. "I have never sent my love to anyone yet," he once said. "Love," I answered, "is the only thing worth sending. I always send my love. Or nothing," I said.

Brock had spoken of the wood. "I could never altogether leave this place." He had been operated on and, everyone believed, was doing well. Only a day or two afterwards they had understood that once more he was seriously ill. Seth and Ellen had called on them. Seth had been rambling and vague. Of course one never knew, and it might not be so serious, he had said. And Brock was strong enough, at least he had at one time been strong enough. But pneumonia, and the lung not healed yet, Seth had said, his voice toneless and falling off.

"You won't go and see him, you mean to say you won't?" Ellen had said, scolding her. She had been vulgar even while she scolded.

"Ellen," Seth had said, "Ellen," warningly.

"I don't care, Seth, I don't care." Ellen had defended herself in loud accusing tones. Mopping his face with a handkerchief of Paisley silk, "I don't know that it would do any good if Barbara Nancy did go," at last Seth had said.

"I'll go," she had said. "Of course I'll go."

"He left me no message?" she had asked at the hospital finally before once more she came away. Nurse May had looked at her, curious and pitying, and, turning away her head for a moment, quite suddenly hostile as well. "I'll ask Sister," she had said.

The Sister had borne down the long corridor like a swan in full stream, like an unruffled swan. She was like a nun too in her starched head-dress, her face smooth and pale as if all the passions of the world had been ironed away out of sight.

Barbara Nancy had waited. The Sister had answered her, gracious and unmoved. "His love, only his love," she had said.

There had been arrows of rain on the white steps as she left; that other time there had been splintered arrows of sun upon them like glass. Where before the sun had burned, the rain, and more than the rain, had laid wet hands upon her face.

You've always been there; you are like the way home, she had once said to Brock Doddington.

She waited in the wood for how long she did not know. The wind stirred the trees, and the trees swayed in a low ripple of movement as the wind ran through the wood. It grew quiet then; it grew cold too. The rooks tossed gently in their clusters of nests in the tall elms, the leaves fell slowly as though one by one. The bells rang still, a hollow clash of sound. They also were silent then. Now silence seemed to come up from the valley into the wood, silence for Brock Doddington who would never come, silence for all the heavy sorrow of the world.

Gradually, as she waited, sound, or her awareness of sound, returned. She was conscious of the light tapping of a woodpecker against the bole of a neighbouring tree, of the quick flick of wings from the small birds in the thickets, of the faint sway of the boughs.

Why, it is ours, she thought, this hope for which they fought, for which so many died; it is ours, it is for people who have freedom in their hearts everywhere. She went on towards the road, the road that led nowhere or everywhere, as she wished, that now, as always, led to the world.

The gate to the road opened, then swung to again, the huntsman's latch clicked noisily into place. Once more she waited, in disbelief, in a suspension of delight and fear. Down the singing aisle of the wood, no ghost, Tamlin came. He held his right arm in a sling, his peaked cap was tucked under his other arm, a wisp of hair stood on end.

sought for Edward and for herself came: We have lived; I am not afraid of the years.

Edward Furness continued his planting of bulbs, white jonquils and yellow narcissi, round the Philosopher's flowering tree. The Philosopher had planted the tree, a Siberian crab, fifteen years ago. Every spring it had bloomed, a tree shaken with blossom, holding its wide pink flowers to the sun; and every spring until he went away the Philosopher would admire it at blossoming-time, cherishing it from a distance, as it were secretly. And this, his father had always thought, was unexpected in the Philosopher, who was no gardener, who was never openly admiring of a single thing. The tree, striking deeper into the soil, flourished still, each year, after the fashion of trees, taking to itself more light, more earth. And now, Edward Furness thought, it should have its crown, transitory like itself, made of white jonquils, parma violets, and yellow narcissi, so that if the Philosopher dreamed sometimes, came back sometimes, he should know.

The bells rang again. Edward listened. That was Joe Colley bringing Peter down too short. Peace, the bells said—even if they rang lopsidedly. But was it peace? For a moment his mind answered in unfamiliar words: Calvary may come again.

The phrase sprang unbidden to his lips. Margaret might have spoken it. Words were often trembling and wild with her, but sometimes also they were swift and apt as well. He had heard her cry once brokenly out of her sleep that Easter when the Philosopher died: "O suffering man, O child, O little child." Her words had stayed like a pattern of their grief in his mind. Now, shaped differently, they appeared as though born again.

He straightened then. Once more he made his way into the house. From habit he took note of everything as he came in: the tall ferns crumbling with autumn at their tips, the little yellow leaves from the fruit trees pitting the brown

tiles like sun-filled April showers, the melting flight of birds—fanning high over the twisted chimneys, over the tops of the trees that were so much higher than the houses, fanning out of sight.

Margaret turned as he came in and looked at him, some sort of speech trembling on her lips. He stood beside her in silence for a moment while the bells rang out merrily again and as though for the last time.

She put out a hand and touched his then.

"Edward," she said, "Edward," as if that were enough.

"Yes," he said.

How many times had he answered her in the same fashion, as if by doing so he gave her part of his own strength, his own peace.

It was then, in that moment, by some transporting trick of memory, that he saw the torches again, and the jostling crowds of Mafeking night; and Barbara Nancy, arms round his neck, was riding shoulder-high, and the wheel had turned full circle again, and Margaret was standing where she stood now, in the same place.

"I saw you," he said, "all those years ago, when we quarrelled, when you thought I did not care. I have never stopped seeing you," he said.

The bells rang again, then ceased. And suddenly, peace seemed to lie between them there, in the hollow of their locked hands, in the pocket of quiet the bells had made now that they had ceased to ring.

"It's peace. It's victory. Look," Edward said.

Margaret's eyes followed his.

Hand in hand, Barbara Nancy and Tamlin stepped in at the outer door. What they had suffered was theirs, was past; all the rest, it was plain, was theirs too, a far country opening before them now.

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